

Scotpress

KNOW THINE ENEMY



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a STAR TREK
fanzine

Viviers

KNOW THINE ENEMY

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Know Thine Enemy, a very alternate universe story where Earth and the Klingon Empire are allied against the Vulcans, is put out by Scotpress and is available from

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Scotpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

KNOW THINE ENEMY

The setting suns of Vulcan cast long red rays over the land, deepening the desert sands into rich ruby. To the north, the red sky blazed, but the sunset was not wholly to blame.

The city of ShiKahr was burning.

The attack, when it had come, had been military and ruthless. The space-port had been the first target, cutting off all escape - after which the massacre and destruction had begun. The attack had been so swift that Vulcan had had no time to prepare her defences.

Four years previously, Vulcan had helped her cousins the Romulans drive off a Klingon attack, but despite vulcanoid strength, the Romulans had eventually succumbed, their planet and colonies devastated and those unlucky enough not to have been killed had been placed under Klingon rule or sold into slavery. Now it was Vulcan's turn to pay the price for allying themselves with the Romulans.

The tall lean figure stood unmoving, staring out towards ShiKahr. Word had it that all ranking Vulcans were being taken into captivity. A few had tried to escape into the desert, but had been quickly recaptured. Their enemies had aircar patrols circling the fringes of the desert. He hoped that Sarek and his mother had somehow escaped. Amanda was an Earthwoman, albeit she had spent most of her life on Vulcan. His father had brought her back to Vulcan with him as his wife; he had met her on Andoria, where talks were being held on the possibility of establishing a Federation of Planets. Vulcan had not joined; her ideals had not coincided with those of the majority of other planets represented. What worried the Vulcan was what her own people would do to her, for the Terrans were also on the planet helping their Klingon allies. However, his parents were bonded in the true Vulcan fashion; neither would survive a long separation. All he could do was await his own fate.

The sinking suns had long since set, but the Vulcan still stood by the window. The fires of ShiKahr glowed against the black velvet sky; the acrid smell of smoke drifted across the desert, fanned on by the night breeze until it hit his nostrils.

His sensitive ears picked up the sound of groundcars approaching the house. He sighed softly. So - it had begun. They would find nobody in the house except himself, for he had sent the servants into the deep areas of the desert many days ago, before the patrols had come, giving them a chance of survival. Lights flared in the grounds; he heard voices and footsteps in the passage outside, and then the door was flung open. Only then did he turn from the window, to face his captors calmly.

Two Earthmen covered him with their weapons while the third looked him up and down. What struck the Vulcan most was the arrogance of the man in front of him, and the fire in his amber eyes. He did not know whether he was sorry that it was a Human and not a Klingon who had captured him. He would receive no compassion from either party, he knew.

"What is your name, Vulcan?" It was more of a command than a question, and Spock felt a coldness in his belly. Here was a man who could be ruthless.

He answered, "I am called Spock."

The Human raised a mocking eye. "And where are all the servants who are normally to be found in big houses such as this one?"

"There is nobody else in the house," Spock replied.

The Human made a gesture, and rough hands caught his, tying them behind his back. The Human waited for the guards to finish securing their prisoner, and then spoke again.

"I am Captain James T. Kirk. You are now a prisoner of the Federation of Planets, and will be treated accordingly. Do not attempt to escape, for then your life will be forfeit. Take him!"

Spock's guards marched him out of the house to the waiting groundcar.

A number of small explosions sounded behind him, and he knew that his ancestral home was being burned to the ground. He stared straight in front of him, his face an unreadable mask. He would not give these Earth-born le-matyas the satisfaction of seeing him react. He was bundled into the back of the vehicle, the two guards flanking him. Moments later, Kirk climbed into the front with the driver. The rest of the men filled the other two cars, and they headed back to the capital city of Surak'Ka.

Kirk frowned. The prisoner's stony silence was grating on his nerves. He had been met with the same expressionless silence while interrogating other Vulcan prisoners, but this one had seemed different to him. Kirk felt the urge to lash out at him; to scream at him to say something, but just as abruptly dismissed the idea. Surely the devastated shell that was Shikahr should have brought some reaction! Driving through the ruined city had caused him to feel depressed, and he was on the side who had caused the destruction, not a native of the planet. The dark fathomless eyes had not betrayed a flicker of emotion.

Hell, thought Kirk, what am I doing here anyway? I should be aboard the Enterprise, not taking part in a crusade of revenge! He sighed. He had his orders, and being a military man, would follow them - whether he liked them or not.

They eventually reached the headquarters situated in the capital city. Spock noticed, ironically, that it was the same building that the Elders had occupied for the running of planetary affairs. The passages were overflowing with Humans and Klingons and their Vulcan prisoners, who conveyed an uneasy air of detachment, their faces unreadable; the flowing, colourful robes contrasted sharply with the military dress of their captors.

Turning a corner, Spock stopped so abruptly that the two guards only narrowly avoided walking into him.

The trolley stood at the far end of the passage, in an alcove. The curtains were not quite closed, and even at that distance Spock could not mistake the small oval face, fair hair and perfectly shaped Human ears. The laughing blue eyes were closed for ever.

Spock was hardly aware of the sharp blows his guards dealt him, or the curses as they pushed him on; he was only aware of the agony and despair creeping through him, body and soul, eating at his mind. He wanted to shout out that he loved her and was sorry for any anguish he had caused her, but he was a Vulcan and could not - would not - give in to the emotional tide that washed over him.

Sarek!

The second shock hit him. His father, too would be either dead or dying. The two people he most cared about were gone.

Through a green haze, Spock realised that he was standing in an office. Kirk was behind the desk, filling in forms. Another man walked in, and Spock saw that he was a doctor from the insignia of his uniform. The doctor hardly glanced at the prisoner as he walked up to the desk, but that he had noticed him was obvious from his first words.

"Hello, Jim. Brought in another one, have you?"

Kirk nodded. There were obviously more things on his mind than Vulcan prisoners. "How's Anderson, Bones?"

The doctor shook his head. "He died."

Kirk's face looked bleak. "Damn. ...I saw the woman outside. Was there nothing you could have done for her?"

The doctor shook his head again. "Sorry, Jim. She lapsed into a coma and

died shortly before you got back. What I would like to know is what the hell she was doing on this God-forsaken planet in the first place. All we know is that her name was Amanda. Hell, I don't even know what killed her."

"You did."

Both men turned in surprise. The doctor flinched at the unmistakeable hatred blazing in the Vulcan's eyes.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" he blustered. "She wasn't even injured when they brought her in." One possibility occurred to him. "Are you a doctor?"

Kirk put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Take it easy, Bones. It wasn't your fault." He moved to stand in front of the prisoner. "You heard Dr. McCoy. Explain!"

Spock stared into angry amber eyes, but they did not frighten him at all. He was in no mood to be intimidated by that stare. "She was bonded to a Vulcan in the true way. When one dies, as her bondmate has most probably done, the other partner will also die."

McCoy exploded. "That's barbaric!" he yelled.

Spock lifted an eyebrow. "It is the Vulcan way. Did it not occur to you, when you helped the Klingons to wipe out the Romulans, that there were many unaccountable deaths? Surely any civilised race would have wanted to find out the answer!"

In some part of his mind Spock was shocked that he could behave in so undignified a manner, openly sneering; but he was walking a very thin line between reality and insanity. One of the guards cuffed him for his insolence, making his head spin. When his eyes focused again, he saw that Kirk was looking at him very thoughtfully, his eyes narrowed.

"You know a lot about this woman," he said. "Who was she?"

"She is...was...my mother." Sanity snapped as he uttered those words. Even though his hands were still secured, Spock launched himself at Kirk, kicking out and catching him in the ribs. Recovering his balance, Spock swung his leg back to deliver the ka'ifa, a death blow, to the Human's heart. He never reached his target. The stunning effect of a phaser hit him in the middle of his back, and he collapsed over Kirk's prone form, blackness closing over him and pulling him down into the bottomless pit of hell.

Leonard McCoy closed his gaping mouth and discovered that he could once more move. The Vulcan's attack had been as unexpected as it was sudden, immobilising him for those few seconds. He hurried over to Kirk's prone form, helping the guards to drag Spock's body roughly off his victim.

Although privately sympathising with the Vulcan, McCoy growled, "Get that Vulcan to a cell." He ran the medical scanner over Kirk's body. The two guards dragged Spock out after summoning the orderlies from sickbay.

Kirk slowly came round. He moaned, and then his eyes snapped open. "Shit!" he gasped. "That hurts!"

McCoy put a hand on his shoulder, easing him back onto the floor. "You just lie still until the stretcher comes," he ordered. "That pointed-eared heathen broke some ribs."

Kirk grimaced. "Some ribs? They feel as if they were all broken."

McCoy smiled. "You'll live, Jim. Luckily nothing punctured your lungs."

Kirk looked round. "Where is he?"

"In a cell, where he belongs. Roberts phasered him before he had the chance to have another go at you."

Kirk gave a crooked grin. "Funny thing is that on the way here, I was wishing that he would react; do something, instead of just sitting there quietly. Looks as if I got my wish."

McCoy did not look impressed. He was sick of Vulcan and Vulcans and the whole messy business. He was a doctor; violent death sickened him. He was constantly living in dread that one day Kirk would be killed. McCoy could not bear to think about that; but Kirk was the kind of person who attracted trouble. McCoy also had the nagging suspicion that Spock of Vulcan would affect their lives, and that they had not seen the last of him. He shivered, as if someone had walked over his grave.

The orderlies arrived at last, and Kirk was whisked off to the temporary sickbay, where McCoy said he would remain until he thought Kirk could return to work. Of course Kirk grumbled, but he knew better than to argue with McCoy.

Awareness returned through shifting grey fog. His head ached and in struggling to rise, he felt nauseous from the after-effects of the phaser. He was feeling cold and slightly hungry, and the useless thought that he needed a shower passed through his mind.

What distressed him the most was the memory of his attack on the Human, and the anger which still burned within him. Anger or sorrow? Kaiidith! What had possessed him to show such raw emotion? His hands still tied behind him, Spock slowly rose to his feet and moved across to the small window, gazing up at the night sky through the bars.

His mother had often shown him where her home planet lay. That had been when he was very young. He had often wondered if she was really happy on Vulcan. She had been so different in many ways, and although she had never lost her Human heritage, she had adopted the Vulcan way of life without complaining. It must have been very difficult for her, even though his father had really loved her. There had been quite a scandal -- and much disapproval -- when Sarek had brought his Human wife home. Many had thought the marriage would fail. It had not, and the arrival of their son had brought them even closer together.

Once more, the memories of his parents made Spock tremble with suppressed emotion. No! Do not think of them! Their life has passed; they have escaped the devastation, the suffering that those who survived must face. Think of escape...and revenge? Illogical. There is no place to escape to. Even the desert wastes of Vulcan were not safe from the Human le-matyas and their Klingon counterparts.

The door banged open, startling Spock from his thoughts. It was the guards and a young Vulcan boy who, Spock guessed, was already in the role of a slave, having to push a trolley of food to the prisoners. At the Humans' directions, he placed a bowl of food on the floor. His eyes caught Spock's, and there was naked terror in them. Spock's face softened.

"K'landra, f'eit sum 'il shantaei." It was a message to keep courage, and the boy nodded gratefully to him.

"Out, you!" One of the guards pushed the boy roughly out of the cell. "Talking to others of your race is not allowed. Understood?"

Spock nodded. "May I enquire -- " was that sarcasm coming through? -- "if these restraints are to be removed?"

The guard shook his head and winked at his companion. "What do you want them taken off for? You can mange to eat without the use of your hands. Kneel and eat like the dogs you people are!" He lowered his voice menacingly. "If you pray to any gods, Vulcan, I suggest you start now. I don't think Captain Kirk is thinking very nice things about you at the moment..." With that, he and his friend left, locking the old-fashioned door behind them.

That was only the beginning. When the two guards realised that Kirk was not going to punish the Vulcan, and seemed indeed to have forgotten all about him, they decided to have some fun. They returned day after day to that isolated cell, and handed out their own kind of justice...

McCoy finally relented, and let Kirk out of sickbay on condition that he took things easy. Of course Kirk grumbled.

"Aw, come on, Bones, you know that we have only five days left to get our quota of Vulcans off planet before the Klingons take over - and that means work!"

"Let your staff handle it. You have enough of them hanging around doing nothing," McCoy retorted.

Kirk opened his mouth to protest, but an incoming message from the Enterprise interrupted him. Kirk thumbed the intercom on his desk. "Kirk here. What is it, Lieutenant?"

Uhura's voice drifted out of the speaker. "We have received a priority message from Admiral Komack, sir. The Klingon High Command is getting impatient, and although they are 'grateful' for our help on Vulcan, they are eager to start governing the planet. The Admiral has ordered us to leave in three days' time. We are the last ship here, sir - the Potemkin broke orbit twenty minutes ago."

Kirk sighed. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Tell Mr. Scott that we will start beaming the prisoners aboard in five hours from now. Have the security detail stand by. Kirk out." He turned to McCoy. "Diplomats! Well, don't stand there, Bones, we have work to do. Any physicals you can't finish here, will have to be done aboard ship, never mind what the regulations state. I am not leaving any of our slaves to the Klingons."

Two days later, with the Vulcans locked up aboard the Enterprise, Kirk, McCoy and a security detail checked the building to see that everything had been left in order. True to nature, McCoy had complained that it was hardly the work of a Captain and Chief Surgeon, but as Kirk reminded him, it was Klingon policy that the highest-ranking man check over any place they were leaving to allies. Klingon protocol could be very annoying...

The last part of their tour covered the cells. Each cell was checked and the forcefield disconnected. Exiting the last cell, Kirk was about to leave when his eye caught sight of a door at the far end of the corridor. "What's in there, Saunders?" he asked.

"It's another cell, sir, but it wasn't used because it has no forcefield."

Kirk nodded. "You'd better check it out, though," he ordered, turning away. He and McCoy were halfway along the corridor when Saunders' exclamation brought them to a halt.

"What is it?" Kirk demanded.

"Sir - uh - I think you'd better see for yourself, sir!"

Kirk and McCoy hurried back. "My God!" was all that McCoy could think of to say; Kirk just stared, the blood draining from his face.

He was kneeling, Vulcan fashion, in the middle of the floor. His hands were still tied behind his back, and his feet were also tightly secured. Bowls of food stood inside the door, obviously not touched, and going bad. The cell was very cold.

The Vulcan did not move, even when Kirk faced him. He seemed to be in a trance, his eyes wide and expressionless; his thin lips tinged green from the cold. A dark bruise shadowed one cheekbone. Kirk stared in horror, recognising the Vulcan who had attacked him.

"Bones, I didn't order this!"

"I know you wouldn't, Jim, and neither did I. All I ordered was for him to be locked up." McCoy sounded grim.

Kirk's eyes hardened. "Take those restraints off him." He flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to transporter room. Five to beam up. Lock onto these co-ordinates and have a medical team standing by. Kirk out."

A humming filled the room; the occupants were each outlined in a golden halo which shimmered them into non-existence. Seconds later they rematerialised aboard the Enterprise, Saunders and the other guard supporting the catatonic Vulcan. He was placed on the waiting trolley and rushed off to sickbay, McCoy following.

Kirk moved to the wall intercom. "Kirk to bridge. Have all personnel beamed up?"

Scott's voice came through. "Aye, Captain. You were the last."

"You still have the con, Mr. Scott. Relay a message to Starfleet that the Klingons now have possession of Vulcan, and prepare to leave orbit. I also want security to arrest Lieutenants Roberts and Brown. They are to be put in the brig and informed of their impending court-martial. Kirk out."

Scott was surprised at the coldness in Kirk's voice. What had those two been up to? Whatever it was, Scott decided, he would not be surprised; both men had a sadistic streak. Scott glanced at communications. "Lieutenant, you heard the Captain. First, though, get me security."

Kirk had first gone to his cabin to shower and change, and then he sent a subspace message to Admiral Komack. By the time he had finished, the Enterprise was already well away from Vulcan.

Although he had not said anything, Kirk felt the same way about Vulcan as McCoy did. He hoped he would never have the misfortune to encounter that planet again. So much misery...and for what? He could not help wondering if the Klingons were not setting themselves up as the governing body of the Federation. They shouted of different atrocities, and the rest of the Federation jumped to attention. Why did they pamper the Klingons so?

Visions of Vulcan came back to him.

Slavery was a way of life. There had been slaves before his grandfather's time, so why was it worrying him now? But he knew why. Gaining slaves the way they had just done sickened him. Sighing, Kirk made his way to sickbay.

There were two guards outside the door. They stood aside and let him in; Kirk went straight to the bed where the Vulcan lay.

They had cleaned him up; his wrists and ankles were bandaged. The only indication that he was still alive was the faint movement of his ribcage as he breathed. What was unnerving were the eyes, still wide and empty. The life signs on the monitor above the bed were very low. Please don't die on me! he silently pleaded, not sure even of why it was so important to him that this Vulcan should live. He turned anxious eyes to McCoy as the surgeon came into the room. "How is he, Bones?"

McCoy shook his head. "I only know that he is barely alive." The doctor looked sharply at Kirk. "His condition is almost the same as his mother's was -- this catatonic state. I don't know what to give him that won't kill him. We know so little about Vulcan physiology. If he comes out of it, it will have to be on his own." McCoy suddenly noticed the lines of fatigue on Kirk's face. "Come on, Jim. I prescribe a drink for us both, and then twenty-four hours' rest for you. Mitchell can relieve Scotty," he added quickly, seeing that Kirk was about to protest.

Kirk smiled. "After you, Doctor."

On entering McCoy's office, Kirk called Scott and arranged for Mitchell to take the con. Accepting the glass from McCoy, he settled in a chair. A moment's silence passed while McCoy waited patiently for his friend to tell him what was worrying him. Kirk eventually broke the silence.

"You know, Bones, I feel as guilty as hell about him. We've had slavery for generations, but somehow the thought of Vulcans as slaves doesn't feel right. I must admit that they frighten me; they seem so cold - so aloof. Even when their cities were flattened and they were taken as slaves...even then there was no condemnation, no anger in their eyes - nothing; only that cold expressionless gaze. As for him - " Kirk nodded towards sickbay - "there was nothing in his eyes either. The sight of ShiKahr should have driven any patriot crazy, but there was nothing. Only when he attacked me...and that was for a totally different reason...there was such hatred then. I feel as if I alone am responsible; for his parents' deaths, the destruction of everything he knew..." He held out his glass for a refill. McCoy replaced the bottle between them and waited for Kirk to continue.

"When his name didn't appear on our lists, I thought he was aboard the Potemkin, and felt both sorry and relieved." Kirk paused and then looked up at McCoy. "I don't know why, but something draws me to him, as if we were destined ... Oh, hell, I don't know." He blushed slightly at McCoy's quizzical stare, and then looked back at him defiantly. "I have already decided to keep him. When we reach Earth, he will work for my mother and Peter. In fact, I have already spoken to Komack - and since we are one slave over our quota, I can have him."

McCoy frowned. "Jim, I hope you know what you are doing. Are you sure that Peter and your mother can handle him?"

Kirk nodded. "They will. Now if you will excuse me, I believe you told me to rest. Let me know if there is any change."

McCoy looked worriedly after the retreating back. "I know there will be trouble," he muttered to himself. "That Vulcan smells of trouble. Felt it the moment I laid eyes on him."

He sat pondering for a moment, and then went to check on his patient. He dismissed the guards - the Vulcan was in no state to cause trouble at the moment. There was no change in his condition; he lay as McCoy had left him. McCoy checked the monitors, and, fastening a restrainer over the motionless form, went back to his office. Funny, he did not feel tired although he had not had a decent night's sleep for weeks. He pulled out a stack of reports and started to work.

Two hours passed and McCoy still sat at his desk, oblivious of everything. A shadow fell over the desk, and McCoy looked up, expecting to see one of the nurses. He froze in shock. It was the Vulcan, and McCoy immediately noticed that he was out of his tranced state. How on earth did he get loose? McCoy wondered.

"You shouldn't be up," he said, not knowing what else to say. A hand reached out to him. I am about to be murdered, he thought. Why don't I shout for help? The moment the thought occurred to him, he opened his mouth to yell, but before he had time to utter a sound, the Vulcan spoke.

"H'waler ala K'l en?"

McCoy blinked. "What did you say?"

A look of uncertainty crossed the dark eyes. "W'yenth L waler K'l en sah' adit."

The Vulcan's outstretched hand fell limply to his side and he stood there

swaying for a moment before toppling forward. McCoy rocketed round his desk, catching the limp form before it hit the floor. He laid him down gently, running a scanner over him. At least he was still alive... Hitting the intercom button, he called Christine Chapel, his head nurse.

"Get in here fast, Chris, I need your help."

Between the two of them, they managed to get the Vulcan back to bed. "Keep an eye on him," McCoy said. "I have to call the Captain."

Kirk was aroused from a deep sleep by the insistent buzzing of the intercom. Cursing, he rolled over and flipped the switch. "Kirk here."

"Sorry to wake you, Jim, but you did tell me to let you know when there was any change in your Vulcan. Well, he's out of that catatonic state. Gave me the fright of my life seeing him standing there..."

"Bones, how did he...?"

"Thought my time had come! Stood there in a real menacing manner, spouting some gibberish, and then he collapsed."

"I'll be right down, Bones."

Kirk dressed quickly, and headed for sickbay. On entering the room, he went over to the bed where McCoy was fastening restrainers over the now moaning Vulcan. "Is he coming round?" he asked.

McCoy finished fastening the last strap. "No, but I'm not taking any more chances. He broke the last lot, so I've added a stronger one." McCoy told Kirk in detail what had happened, finishing with, "Jim, I have a suggestion. A Vulcan will know what makes another Vulcan tick. Couldn't we ask another Vulcan what state his mind is in? I know there aren't any of their physicians on board, but we could try."

Kirk nodded. "It's worth a try, Bones. I'll see to it." He paused by the door. Nurse Chapel was doing her best to calm the now thrashing figure.

We've brought such pain to these people, he thought, then comforted himself with the thought that if he had been left for the Klingons to find, this one would now be dead.

Kirk arrived in the cargo area, which had been reconstructed into a temporary brig. Straightening his shoulders, he walked between the cells, ignoring the bland stares he received, until he came to one whose occupant was older than the others. Motioning the guard to switch off the forcefield, he stepped inside.

The Vulcan watched him with expressionless eyes. Always expressionless! "What is your name?" Kirk asked.

"Sallorn." The reply was soft as the Vulcan rose to his feet.

"There is a Vulcan in sickbay," Kirk said. "His name is Spock. He is desperately ill, but due to our ignorance of your race's metabolism, we do not know how to treat him. We need your help."

Sallorn's eyebrows rose. "I am no physician," he said.

"I am aware of that," Kirk replied, "but your presence might bring him out of it. I do not wish to lose him."

Sallorn's other eyebrow joined its mate, but he nodded and followed Kirk along the corridors to sickbay, a security guard at his back. On their arrival in sickbay, McCoy tersely related to Sallorn what Spock's condition was.

"There is only one option open to me," Sallorn said, "and that is to initiate a meld."

McCoy was instantly suspicious. "What do you mean?"

Sallorn repressed a sigh. These Humans were so ignorant of Vulcan behaviour! Although these ones, at least, admitted it. "It is the joining of two minds, Doctor. I will have to enter his mind and try to guide him away from the cause of his mental state. I only ask that you do not interfere, however long it takes, or we may both die."

McCoy was incredulous. "You mean he can draw you down with him?"

"Affirmative." Sallorn raised a questioning eyebrow at Kirk, who nodded. He could see that neither Human really understood what he was about to do. Drawing up a chair next to the bed, Sallorn flexed his fingers. He objected to the two Humans being present at such a private act, but realised that they would never leave him alone with Spock - and better these two senior officers, who were at least showing some interest in Spock's welfare, than a security guard. He spread his fingers and placed them on the meld points of Spock's temple.

Darkness. Black empty space cutting off all escape. A pinpoint of light glowed weakly ahead of him, but he could not reach it. Shapes started forming round him. They were unrecognisable at first, but then they began to take form - Sarek, Amanda, T'Pol, T'Poling... They were all calling out to him, but he couldn't hear them no matter how hard he tried; he only saw their mouths forming his name over and over again. They started to fade, beckoning to him to follow, but his body felt leaden and he could not move. He called out to them to wait, but they started to shimmer, and then they disappeared.

New shapes formed in the space they had left. Two large lion-coloured eyes formed, which looked into his very soul, accusing and condemning. Kaiidth, he could not escape those eyes! Even as he watched, they started to melt into golden drops of fire which rained down onto his body, scorching his flesh. Evil laughter surrounding him - the two guards degrading him; blow after blow. Escape it! Close the mind to everything; follow the path to the inner sanctum. There you will be safe; they cannot touch you there. Sarek is dead. Amanda is dead. Vulcan is no more. Vulcan is dead...dead...dead...

//No, Spock! Fight it!//

//I am hallucinating. They are not telepathic. Escape!//

//Spock - it is I, your cousin Sallorn. Do not draw me down with you.//

"Sallorn - I did not give you permission to meld. It may be too late for you to withdraw if you do not pull out immediately.//

//I beg your forgiveness, and I grieve with thee at thy loss. Let me help.//

//No. Withdraw.//

//Hear me first, I beg thee.//

Silence. Then - //Proceed.//

Sallorn gave a mental sigh of relief. If Spock was willing to listen to him, there was still a chance of giving him back the will to live. //We are on board the Federation vessel, U.S.S. Enterprise, heading for Earth. The captain asked me to help you because they could not.// He felt a slight ripple of surprise, then continued. //We have all been well treated, Spock; only you were not, and I do not think it was on the orders of this captain. But Spock, listen to me. Vulcan is not the conquered planet that she seems to be. There are still Vulcans who are free. They are in the deep areas of the desert, where few Outworlders go; they are at the old S'Kandarai camping grounds, awaiting the chance to retaliate and drive the Klingons from Vulcan soil.//

//Vulcans? Safe at Koon'et'Larai? How do you know of this?//

//I was on my way back from there to help others to escape when I was caught. Let me tell you of our plans...//

Kirk looked into sickbay for the tenth time. How long would this go on?

"Bones, how much longer must we wait?"

McCoy, who had also been pacing restlessly back and forth, shrugged. "How do I know? I'm only a doctor! Jim, why don't you just go back to the bridge? I'll call you -- "

Kirk smiled. "Trying to get rid of me, Doctor?"

McCoy did not reply. He looked back towards the bed. Both Vulcans were motionless, but beads of perspiration ran down Sallorn's face. I wonder what is going on in there, McCoy thought. What a weird lot they are!

//Sallorn, what you suggest is illogical, but there is no other way.//

//So you agree? Good. We will all find a way to return to Vulcan, even though more blood will be shed.// Sallorn gave another inward sigh. The greater risk still lay ahead -- to lead Spock's mind out of the Kwa'sahn -- the ritual Vulcan suicide. Spock was so far into the Kwa'sahn that he could not pull out of it without help. Sallorn sent a mind-rippling question, and on feeling the affirmative from Spock's mind, sent out a strong invisible thread to bind Spock more closely to him. This bond would be broken in the last stages of his return to consciousness.

The two gossamer threads surfaced, following the path of Sallorn's entry. //This is where I leave you, cousin.// Sallorn said. //As I told you, I believe this Kirk can be easily handled. He has compassion, although he tries to hide it, and I feel that he already has plans for you. I think you would be wise to be careful of the Doctor; he sees more than he would have you think.//

//I will heed your advice, cousin. Live long and prosper, Sallorn of Vulcan.//

//Live long and prosper, Spock. May we meet again on our homeworld.// Sallorn wrenched at the link, breaking and dissolving it as he left Spock's mind. He was unable to prevent himself from crying out from the intense and sudden pain and he collapsed, gasping for breath.

He slowly became aware of the Doctor and the Captain at his side, and sat up, sternly controlling himself. "It is done," he said. "He has gone into a light healing trance, and will awaken on his own."

McCoy was taking readings with his scanner, and although most of them still baffled him, he decided that the elderly Vulcan was correct. "What was wrong with him?" he asked.

Sallorn hesitated, studying the two Humans, and decided to tell them the truth. Lying did not come easy to a Vulcan -- and, illogical though it was, he did trust these two Humans. "He was deep into the Kwa'sahn -- that is, suicide by willing himself to die -- and could not extricate himself without assistance. I do not believe it was intentional; it was brought on by the shock of his parents' death followed so quickly by the abuse he suffered. It all resulted in a traumatic collapse." He waited for the comments he was sure would result.

"You mean you could communicate with him, and he told you what happened to him?" McCoy asked incredulously.

Sallorn nodded. "Affirmative; but he did not actually tell me; I saw what happened in his mind."

Kirk's lips tightened. "The necessary steps are being taken," he said. "The guards responsible are under arrest, and will be court-martialled for acting as they did. I will personally see to it that they do not wriggle out of it." He smiled. "Thank you, Sallorn." He called the guard, and Sallorn was taken back to his cell. He had expected nothing more.

Back in his cell, Sallorn settled himself to meditate. So, the son of Sarek still had a heart ruled by emotion. He had seen a great deal of his cousin's conflicting emotions during the meld. Spock had been unaware that his shields were all down, Sallorn admitted to himself. Perhaps it would leave Spock better prepared for what lay ahead of them. Sallorn allowed himself a fleeting smile. Yes, it would be a long wait, but they would be rewarded in the end. Then both Klingons and Humans would find out what Vulcan revenge was...

On the third day, Spock woke exhausted but clear-headed from the healing trance. He took note of his surroundings. This was obviously a sickbay. Yes -- Sallorn had said they were aboard the Enterprise.

The far door opened and a young woman came in. She was dressed in nurse's uniform. "Ah -- you're awake at last," she said. "Good. I'll call Dr. McCoy." She smiled down at him, which bewildered him; such interest and friendliness towards a slave?

Nurse Chapel checked the restraints, and then left the room. The Vulcan still looked terribly tired, she thought; the three days that she had spent caring for him had come to mean something to her. She felt attracted to him. Christine chided herself. He was, after all, a slave. Pity. She duly called McCoy, then went back to the bank of monitors.

McCoy came into the office. "Hi, Chris. So our sleeping beauty has finally decided to rejoin the living. Let's have a look."

He went into the room and looked down at the Vulcan. "How do you feel?" he asked gruffly.

A slanted eyebrow rose. "Functional."

McCoy managed to hide his irritation. "Well, you have Sallorn to thank for that, not me." He fiddled with the dials above the bed. "We didn't know what was wrong with you -- apart from the obvious. Jim was fit to chew steel when he found out about it." He looked at the readout once more and shrugged. "I hope you don't mean to make a habit of this. A couple of days and you can leave sickbay."

Spock did not have to ask where he would be moved to, but at least it seemed that this time he need not fear the sort of abuse he had been subjected to on Vulcan. Weariness overtook him and he drifted off to sleep.

When he next awoke, McCoy pronounced him fit. He was fed, given a standard slave coverall to put on, and then he was escorted to the cell area.

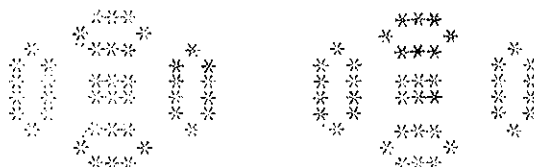
Two ship days passed. He saw no-one except the guard who brought his food. He spent most of the time meditating, slowly putting his thoughts in order.

It was during one of these sessions that he became aware of something missing. The ship's engines were silent. They had to be orbiting Earth.

On questioning the guard, he was told that the majority of the slaves had already been beamed down to the auction blocks. He hoped that all was well with Sallorn.

Later that day, the remainder of the slaves were herded past his cell. Nobody came for him.

He waited. What was in store for him?



Captain James T. Kirk left the bridge and made his way to the Doctor's cabin. The door slid open when he buzzed, and he walked in.

"Hello, Bones, are you ready?"

McCoy looked up from the case he was closing. "Sure thing, Jim. Just putting in my portable fishing rods. Can't go without my fishing gear." Kirk noticed with amusement that the case only just closed. The Doctor always managed to take more stuff than was necessary. "Are you sure your family won't mind my coming? It's going to be a big enough shock being saddled with that poker-faced Vulcan of yours."

Kirk laughed. "Come on, Bones. Mom knows that we're coming, and she knows about Spock."

"Right then. Let's go fetch your wonder boy and head for the hills."

The two men left their baggage at the transporter room and then made their way to the cargo area. "What was his reaction to learning that you own him?" McCoy asked.

Kirk grinned. "He doesn't know yet."

"What?" McCoy was incredulous. "Oh, boy! This, I don't want to miss!"

When they reached the cell, the guard switched off the force field and they went in. Spock rose from the floor and waited.

Kirk cleared his throat. "Spock, you are coming with me. You are now legally my property, and I have decided that you can work on my mother's farm. You will be responsible to her when I am not there."

Spock's eyebrows rose, but he said nothing. Obediently, he let Kirk put a restrainer belt round his waist, and followed Kirk and the disappointed McCoy to the transporter room. Picking up the two indicated suitcases he took his place on the platform. Seconds later, he was, for the first time, on his mother's home planet.

They made their way through the crowded spaceport to the rented aircar parking lot. After settling the bill and making arrangements for the car's return, they were on their way, with Kirk driving.

Sitting in the back with the luggage, Spock took no interest in the spectacular view of Iowa spread beneath him. He was already formulating a plan of escape.

If Kirk's new slave showed a lack of interest in the surrounding countryside, neither Kirk nor McCoy noticed. They were eagerly discussing their plans for the next few days. There would be days of fishing for McCoy, and days of hiking for Kirk. In between their discussions, Kirk would point out interesting landmarks to his friend, forgetting how many times he had already pointed them out to McCoy on previous visits.

"There's the farm, Bones."

McCoy nodded, and then remembering the Vulcan for the first time, twisted around in his seat. "That's to be your new home, Spock. You couldn't find a better place to be."

Spock could think of a much better place - his own home - but he adopted the role of a docile slave. "Indeed," he said, and then remembered to add "sir." McCoy looked at him sharply, but said nothing more.

Kirk landed close to the farmhouse, cutting the engine. After telling Spock to bring the luggage, he and McCoy went up to the house. The front door burst open and his mother rushed to meet them.

"Jimmy! You're earlier than I expected. And Dr. McCoy, too! Oh, dear, what a sight I must look!"

Kirk laughed with delight and swung his mother round. He gave her a big kiss and then placed her back on her feet. "You look fine, Mom. It's great to see you again."

McCoy stepped forward. "As Jim said, it's good to see you, Ma'am."

Alice Kirk beamed happily at the two of them, and then her eyes caught sight of the solitary figure standing in the background, two suitcases in his hands. "Is that the new slave, Jimmy?" she asked.

Kirk started in surprise. In the mad rush of welcome he had forgotten Spock. "Oh, yes. Spock, come here please." When the Vulcan had walked over, he introduced him to his mother. "Spock, this is Mrs. Kirk, from whom you will be taking orders when I am not here."

Spock inclined his head. "Madam," was all he said.

"Well, Spock, you can take the cases upstairs," Alice Kirk said. "Petra is in the kitchen. Turn left at the end of the passage. She will show you where to put them and then get you settled."

After Spock disappeared into the house she put an arm round each of the men. "I bet you are both hungry. I don't think Starfleet feeds you people well enough. Into the house, both of you!"

Laughing, they went inside.

Spock had no trouble finding the kitchen or Petra. She was busy mixing dough when he walked in.

"Who might you be?" she asked, hands on hips, ignoring the flour that she was depositing on her clothes.

"I am the new...slave." The word was difficult to say. "My name is Spock. I was told that you would show me where to put the Captain's and Dr. McCoy's luggage...also, where I am to stay."

Petra smiled. "Follow me, Spock."

He followed her into the hall and up a wide staircase. The house was old, the floors made of wood, as was the ceiling which was supported by large wooden beams. The cases were deposited in the two bedrooms, and he followed her back downstairs.

They went through the kitchen, out of the back door into a courtyard. On the far side stood a long, low building. There was only one door, as far as Spock could make out. All the windows were barred. Entering the building, he saw that there was a central corridor with rooms opening off it. Petra led him to a room at the far end of the corridor. "This will be your room," she said. "After you have freshened up, come back to the kitchen and I'll give you something to eat."

Spock slowly surveyed his surroundings. The room consisted of a bed, a table and a small closet. Another door led into a small wash area equipped with a hydro shower and a toilet. He was surprised that such luxury existed for slaves. A clean coverall had been laid out on the bed for him. Kirk had certainly been thorough in his instructions.

After showering and changing, Spock returned to the kitchen where Petra greeted him with a plate of food and tea. He picked at the vegetables and left the rest.

"Don't you like the stew?" Petra asked.

"I apologise. Vulcans do not eat meat," Spock told her.

She smiled. "Don't worry. I'll remember, now that I've been told. I'm surprised I wasn't warned."

"I am not sure if Captain Kirk knows, although Dr. McCoy certainly does."

Petra nodded, and gave him some more vegetables. "When you've finished you can catch up on some sleep. They won't be needing you today. We can leave the introductions to the other slaves for tomorrow."

Spock was grateful for the respite. After finishing his meal he returned to his room and settled down to meditate.

After a superb supper, McCoy, Kirk and his mother returned to the living room for coffee. "That meal was great," McCoy said. "My compliments to the chef."

"I am glad you enjoyed it, Doctor. What are you two going to do tomorrow, Jimmy?"

"I know what Bones is going to do!" Kirk replied. "Head for the fishing area -- eh, Bones?"

"Sure am. I didn't bring my fishing gear for nothing! Now, if you two will excuse me, I'm going to bed."

After McCoy left, Kirk and his mother sat in companionable silence for a while. Alice Kirk finally broke the silence.

"What is Spock like, Jim?"

Kirk frowned. "I don't really know. Quiet, calculating like all Vulcans, I guess. Not very much is known about them, except what the Klingons have said."

Alice Kirk frowned. She neither trusted nor liked Klingons. "What have they said?"

Kirk looked irritated. "Mom, surely you watch the news! The atrocities the Vulcans dealt out to occupied Klingon territories, murdering innocent civilians. Then there was the space piracy. That had to be stopped. Once allied with the Romulans -- who, I might add, were guilty of the same crimes -- there would have been no stopping them. They would have endangered the entire safety of the galaxy!" He got up to stand by the window.

"So," Alice Kirk said, "two races are massacred, subjugated and taken into slavery on the word of the Klingons." An uncomfortable silence ensued. "Jimmy, why did you buy him?"

Kirk turned. "If I tell you that something compelled me, would you believe me?"

"Dr. McCoy told me that he attacked you -- and you still felt compelled to buy him? I think it is more than that."

"Such as what?" Kirk snapped.

"That, my dear, is something you will have to work out by yourself."

Kirk went over to his mother's side. "Don't worry. Keep the restrainer on him and everything will be fine." He kissed her cheek and went off to bed.

"You are such a fool at times, my son," Alice Kirk said aloud to the closed door. "Keep an animal shackled and he will still turn on you. When you leave, that restrainer comes off!"

Spock found no peace in meditation that night. He finally gave up and went to bed, but sleep also eluded him. The restrainer round his waist was uncomfortable. It was a flat belt worn under clothing, so it was still possible for the wearer to change clothes without the belt being removed. It was also waterproof, enabling the wearer to shower without fear of being electrocuted.

Spock finally fell asleep, unaware of the other slaves going to their rooms,

or even of the figure that looked in on him before the slaves' quarters were secured for the night.

Peter Kirk greeted his grandmother with affection. "Hi, grandma. I see Uncle Jim and Dr. McCoy have arrived. Sorry I wasn't here, but we had to track that cow quite a way before catching up with her."

Alice Kirk looked at her grandson equally affectionately. He looked so much like his father, but fortunately lacked Sam's poor character. After his parents' tragic death, she had raised him and knew that he loved the land as much as she did. At least there was one member of the family who was not space happy.

"Have you checked on the new slave?" she asked.

"Yes. What work do you want him to do?"

"Well, as he is alien to our farming methods, it might be a good idea to take him with you to check the fences." Peter nodded. "Here," she said. "That is the spare key for the belt he has on."

Her grandson eyed it with disgust. "Don't worry - as soon as your uncle has left, we will remove it."

Thus started the days of Spock's enslavement. He was roused early the next day, and over breakfast in the slaves' eating room was introduced to the other slaves. There were five others; Petra he had already met. Teena was another female, of Orion stock, who worked in the house. Then there were two elderly Andorians, Sheelav and Shilla who helped Peter, and lastly the old gardener, Voyran, whose ancestry Spock could not guess and who had been enslaved so young that he himself did not know. From the way they talked of their owners and their work, Spock realised that they were content to be where they were; Alice Kirk, it seemed, was a good and kind owner.

So be it, he thought. If the other slaves were content, it meant that it would be easier for him to escape. But not yet. He would bide his time until the best opportunity presented itself, and then he would return home. It would not be easy. It would be illogical to imagine that it could be, but he would manage, and with those still on Vulcan, he would help to put Sallorn's plan into proper working order.

Kirk sat with his back resting against a tree trunk. From the position he was in, the view was stimulating.

The days had passed rapidly and on the following day he and McCoy would return to the Enterprise.

Two figures rode into view below. It was Peter and Spock. Over the past few days, the Vulcan had fallen easily into the routine of farm life, and on asking Peter, Kirk had heard that he was a good worker who seemed to do everything with ease. He even seemed to be the better rider, even though Kirk knew that the Vulcan had never been on a horse in his life before.

Kirk had also been steadily avoiding the Vulcan, and he realised that it was guilt that he felt whenever he saw him. Had his mother seen, with her female intuition, that he carried this terrible burden of guilt? Would he prefer the Vulcan as friend rather than slave?

Kirk stood, and swinging himself into his saddle, rode down the hill to the two figures busily mending a fence.

As he rode up, Peter put down the welding laser and came forward to greet

him. Spock looked up once, then continued welding his piece of broken fence. Well, what did you expect? Kirk scolded himself.

"Hello, Uncle Jim." Peter smiled up at him. "If you've come to help, you're too late. Spock and I have just about finished here."

Kirk laughed. "'Work' is a dirty word to me when I'm on shore leave."

Peter grinned. "I bet Dr. McCoy is fishing again, or else you wouldn't be looking for company!"

"Actually, he chased me away; said I was frightening the fish with all of my chatter," Kirk said.

"We won't be much longer," Peter told him, picking up the laser. "Then we can all go home for a well-earned coffee." He turned back to the fence.

"Peter, don't!"

Kirk looked up, startled, in time to see Spock's hand clamp down over his nephew's wrist. His momentum carried them both to the ground.

Graceful as a cat, Spock was on his feet helping Peter before Kirk could reach them. "My apologies, sir," Spock said. "I regret knocking you down, but you apparently failed to notice that piece of uninsulated cable."

Peter rubbed his wrist. "You're right, I didn't notice it. Thank you, Spock - you saved my life."

Kirk noticed the finger imprints on his nephew's wrist. "You O.K., Peter?" he asked, remembering the unleashed strength the Vulcan had demonstrated on him. Peter nodded. "Good. Pack up and we can go home."

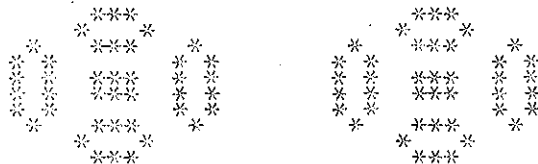
While waiting for Spock to collect the tools, Kirk could not help wondering why the restrainer had not halted the Vulcan. The strength of the one Spock had on should have stopped any sudden movement. Thank goodness it hadn't.

On reaching the house, Kirk sent Peter inside and then walked to the stables with Spock, leading his own horse. Once there he turned to the Vulcan. "Take off your shirt," he snapped. "I want to check that belt."

Eyebrows climbing, Spock did as he was told. "Just as I thought," Kirk said. "The belt isn't working." Spock looked innocently at him. Taking the key from his belt, Kirk unfastened the belt. "O.K.," he said gruffly. "It can stay off for the moment."

Spock gave an inward sigh of relief. He had neutralised the belt that very morning with the aid of one of the welding lasers before riding out with Peter. He did not relish the thought of going through that again. It was also with a certain amount of relief that he remembered that Kirk and McCoy would be leaving the next morning. He got the impression that Kirk could read him very well, no matter what barriers he erected.

As Spock set about rubbing down the horses, he failed to notice Kirk watching him with a very thoughtful expression.

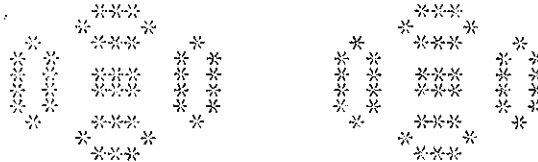


Killon shifted his feet uncomfortably. Thank Kohl that this was his last stint of guard duty. Tomorrow he would turn his back on this planet for the last time. No more guarding of ammunition dumps for him -- he would be returning home to the Klingon Empire. Killon nodded in satisfaction; he would probably get promotion, as every warrior returning home had been rewarded for fighting so valiantly for possession of this planet. Killon let his thoughts wander to

T'Rilla. He would leave her behind. Vulcan women were too cold.

Unfortunately for Killon, he never received his promotion. His reflexes were too slow, and he died before he hit the ground, his neck broken. Shadowy figures, as silent as sehlat, slipped into the ammunition dump and as silently departed again. Moments later, an explosion shook the ground and Vulcan's night sky lit up.

It was only the beginning...



Spock shovelled the last bit of snow from the pathways.

He had been on the farm for eight Earth months. The day before, he had heard Mrs. Kirk informing Peter that her son would be coming home for a short visit; it was nearly time for him to arrive.

Rumours had been filtering through of unrest on Vulcan. An elusive group had been sabotaging the Klingon camps. Because of the number of Vulcans on Earth, Spock knew that he would have to escape soon, before security was tightened around the spaceports.

As the days passed Spock continued with his work, and if he was nervous, he did not show it. He had set himself apart from the other slaves, and they left him alone, respecting his solitude. The only two he really talked to were Kirk's mother and Peter. He respected them both, and they, in turn, gave him more and more freedom around the farm -- and they had never made him wear the hated restrainer belt.

When Kirk arrived, Spock noticed, with a certain unVulcan irritation, that McCoy was once more with him. No matter; he could be dealt with.

That night, after the slaves had been locked in, Spock waited for the main house to settle down. As the last light was switched off, he carefully checked his bag of stolen supplies and then eased the loosened bars from the window. Slipping through, he quietly replaced them and then threw a plundered flare into the room. It landed neatly in the middle of his bed, igniting the bedding. The smoke sensors set off the alarm; as the noise sliced through the night Spock melted into the shadows. Let it work! he breathed.

Kirk bolted upright in bed. Red alert! Then he remembered where he was; at home in Iowa. It was the fire alarm! Looking through the window he saw smoke pouring out of the slaves' quarters. Throwing on his clothes he raced into the corridor, colliding with McCoy.

"What's going on?" McCoy demanded.

"Fire!" Kirk yelled. "Mother, Peter, fire in the slave's quarters! We must get them out!"

He raced out of the house to the low building, unbolted the main door, and counted the slaves as they ran out. Five!

Spock! He raced to the end door and flung it wide; he was forced to his knees by the blast of flames and smoke. The room was an inferno. "Spock!"

"It's too late, Jim." McCoy was at his side. "Come -- we must hurry; this whole section is going to come down."

By the time they both got out, both men were coughing and wiping smoke-filled eyes. McCoy guided Kirk to the side of the stables, setting him down. "You



catch your breath, Jim. I'll see what I can do."

Kirk nodded wearily. He closed his eyes. God, how did this happen? After a minute he got to his feet and was on the point of going to help when a crushing grip closed around his arm, and before he could cry out, iron fingers gripped him at a point behind his neck and he knew no more.

Hoisting Kirk's unconscious body over his shoulder, Spock slipped around the corner to where the aircar was parked. He had not been able to get hold of the keys, but he was certain that he could get it started. Dumping Kirk's body into the back, he slid under the console, reaching for the connecting wires. The engine fired.

"That's far enough, Spock!"

Spock sighed and climbed out of the aircar to stand in front of McCoy, who was pointing a phaser at him. As McCoy moved towards him, Spock moved. With lightning speed he brought his raised arm down across the Doctor's shoulder. McCoy collapsed unmoving in the snow.

"You will never learn, Doctor," Spock said. Retrieving McCoy's phaser, he climbed back into the aircar and flew off.

The farm was far behind them when Spock finally landed. He dug out a pair of restrainer cuffs from among his stolen supplies and fastened Kirk's wrists. It would not do to be attacked while piloting the aircar! He made Kirk as comfortable as possible on the back seat, strapping him in. For his own safety, and mine, he thought. He then took out an aerial map to plot out the safest route to the spaceport.

A small scuffling sound made Spock turn in his seat, to be confronted by a pair of angry hazel eyes. He stared back calmly.

"Why, Spock?" The anger in Kirk's voice was unmistakeable.

"I needed a diversion. Someone could have seen me leaving and raised the alarm. Everybody needed to be occupied. As for yourself, it was a temptation I could not resist." He raised a sardonic eyebrow. "Your friend Dr. McCoy nearly ruined everything. I regret that he will have a headache."

Kirk strained at his bonds. "What do you hope to achieve? Do you know the penalty for runaway slaves?"

Spock nodded. "Affirmative - but we will not be caught."

Kirk was surprised at the optimism of that remark. "Where do you think you can hide? The authorities are most probably looking for us by now."

"That is true," the Vulcan acknowledged. "We had better proceed to the spaceport with no further loss of time."

Kirk looked puzzled. "The spaceport?" he asked.

Spock's eyebrows rose. "Indeed, Captain. How else do we get to Vulcan?"

Kirk was speechless for a moment. "Vulcan? You are planning to steal a spacecraft?" Spock nodded. "And you are going to force me to go with you to Vulcan?" Spock nodded again. "Damn you to hell, Spock! I will never forgive you for this!" he snarled.

Spock's eyes went cold and his voice even colder. "As I will never forgive what has been done to my people and my planet."

"You will never get away with this," Kirk said after a moment.

"We will see, Jim Kirk. We will see."

McCoy nursed an aching head and shoulder. "What a fool I was!" he groaned.

"I should have phasered him when I had the chance."

Alice Kirk took his hand. "Don't blame yourself, Doctor. The authorities have been alerted."

The door opened and Peter came in. "There's no sign of him," he said.

McCoy scowled. "What's the use? That aircar's hundreds of kilometres away by now."

Peter shook his head, glancing at his grandmother. "I was referring to Uncle Jim."

McCoy was confused. "Are you telling me what I think you are? That Jim is missing?" Peter nodded, and a cold hand clutched at McCoy's stomach. He had left Jim at the stables, and the aircar had been around the corner. "Oh, no," he breathed. "Spock has got him!"

Alice Kirk looked troubled. "We don't know for sure," she said.

McCoy stood, a movement that shot pain through his head, but he ignored it. "Well, I am sure. That blasted Vulcan has kidnapped Jim!"

Spock blinked in disbelief and raised the night glasses to have another look. Yes, he was not mistaken; it was his father's private shuttle!

The Surak sat gleaming on her launch pad, and Spock was almost tempted to believe in luck. He sat back in the long grass, pondering on how to get into the spaceport's private enclosure. That was the main obstacle... He could not cut the fence, as that would surely set off an alarm; besides the fence was sure to be electrified. He dismissed the idea of simply flying over the fence, as that would also be prohibited. No -- there was only one way to get in. Rising to his feet he went back to the aircar, where Kirk greeted him with hostility.

"Satisfied?" he asked. "You must realise now that there is no way you can get in without being detected."

"You are correct; that is why we will drive in."

Kirk's eyes widened. "You are going to drive in? You must realise that I will give the alarm!"

"I do," Spock said. "I regret what I must do." He stretched out a long-fingered hand and once more demonstrated the neck pinch on Kirk. Then, unfastening his hands, he propped Kirk up on the back seat and started the motor. Gliding up to the entrance, he stopped, waiting for the guard to come out, feeling slightly apprehensive. He did not dwell on the thought of what would happen to him if he was caught.

At the guard's gesture, he slid the door back and handed him Kirk's ID card, thanking providence that the Captain had had it on him. "My master has been... overindulging in alcohol," he said, seeing the guard's eyes narrow at the sight of Kirk.

"What is your destination, Vulcan?" he snapped. He obviously felt that it was not fitting that he should have to talk to a slave.

"Cairo," Spock lied easily, thankful that his mother had taught him something about her planet.

"What craft?"

Would he know the owners of the various craft? Spock calmed his inner panic. "The Surak," he said.

He felt quite weak when the guard handed the ID back and waved him through. He manoeuvred the aircar towards the Surak, parking it some distance from the landing pad. Dragging Kirk's limp form from the car, he hoisted him over his shoulder, and taking the bag of supplies, approached the shuttle. The door was

locked, but his father had installed a lock override system that the Earthers would not know about. He coded in the number sequence and the door slid open. Locking it behind him, he deposited Kirk in the sleeping cabin, securing his hands and fastening him down to the bunk. He then went to the controls to plot their course. He calculated that they would only just reach Vulcan on the amount of fuel available; luckily the Human owner had left the Surak with an almost full fuel core.

The space controller suspected nothing, and gave clearance for take-off. Power was fed into the engines, and the graceful craft lifted off. Spock fired the boosters and they left Earth's atmosphere, breaking through her gravitational pull, heading for deep space.

High above the Earth, the U.S.S. Enterprise floated gracefully against the jewel-studded background. Lieutenant-Commander Montgomery Scott sat in the Captain's chair watching the shuttle's passage across the main viewscreen. Och, that is a bonny craft, he thought. Idly, he wondered where she was heading. He was anxious for his own beloved ship to head back into space. Never mind - only two more days until the Captain and Dr. McCoy returned.

Kirk lay fuming on the bunk. On regaining his senses he had realised that he was on board a spacecraft, and unable to free himself, he lay cursing Spock. He felt the engines vibrate and the G-force of take-off. Moments, later, they were in space.

My God, he's done it! He wondered vaguely what Spock was going to do with him. I must try to escape, he thought, his mouth set in a grim line. Spock could not keep an eye on him all the time; flying the craft alone would take much of his time and concentration. The engine beat changed. Kirk felt mild surprise, recognising warp drive. So - this was a long-range craft.

The click of the lock brought him back from his musing. He glanced up as Spock entered. "Congratulations," he said. "I did not think that you would pull it off."

Spock's eyebrows rose. He did not comment on the fact that he had had some doubts as well. He bent over and unfastened the straps, then unfastened Kirk's cuffs. "You must be hungry," he said.

Kirk, rubbing his wrists, nodded. "Yes, I am."

Spock left, locking the door behind him, to fetch some food. Kirk sat on the edge of the bunk. There was nothing that he could use as a weapon, so he would have to try to jump the Vulcan before they were too far from Earth.

Spock soon came back with a tray of food. "Thank you," Kirk said, trying to behave normally. He needed the element of surprise. As Spock turned, Kirk launched himself at the Vulcan. They both hit the floor, and Kirk chopped his hand down on the Vulcan's neck, and knew instantly that he had misjudged. His blow caught Spock on the shoulder instead of the vital pressure point. The next moment he found himself flat on his back, his arms pinioned in a crushing grip. Biting his lip, he continued to struggle, but the Vulcan's strength was too much for him.

"You are only hurting yourself, Captain. I suggest you behave yourself."

Kirk's mouth curled in a sneer. "What are you going to do, Spock?" he spat. "Put me to bed without any supper?"

Spock looked at him calmly. "That can always be arranged."

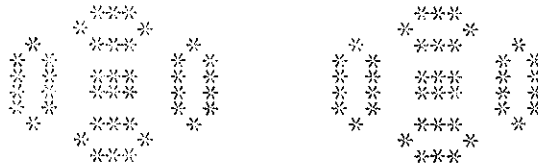
"I promise you, Spock," Kirk said, "that I will obstruct you at every chance I get!"

An eyebrow lifted. In one swift movement Spock was on his feet, pulling Kirk up in a vice-like grip, and slapping the restrainers back on the Human's wrists. "I regret doing this," he said, the memory of his own captivity back on

Vulcan still etched sharply on his mind, "but you leave me no choice. You will still be able to eat with those on. The sanitary facilities are through that door; unfortunately there is only a sonic shower, so I suggest you check the setting before using it."

He left, locking the door, and to Kirk it tolled 'abandon all hope'. He stared at the door, at the food, at the bathroom door, at his shackled wrists.

He had never felt so miserable in his life.



The journey to Vulcan was frustrating for Kirk. He saw little of Spock, and spent most of his time either sleeping or pacing the small cabin for exercise. He was sick of the synthetic food that the Vulcan brought him; but most of all he longed for company. At times he was tempted to ask Spock to stay and talk, but each time he remembered his humiliation, and anger stopped him.

On the fourth day out from Earth, Kirk was rudely awakened. The shuttle gave a shuddering lurch, throwing him from the bunk with a resounding thump. Now what? he thought, grimly hanging on to the edge of the bunk as the craft continued to twist and roll. Then the shuttle levelled out and Kirk dragged himself to his feet, only to be thrown off balance once more by further jolting. There was a terrific bump, and then nothing, as the engines cut out. Warily, Kirk climbed to his feet once more, bruised and shaken. He went to the porthole, and his throat and chest constricted. Sand - as far as the eye could see.

"Welcome to Vulcan, Captain," the soft voice said.

Kirk turned to see Spock standing at the door. He said nothing.

"I apologise for the rough landing, but there was insufficient time to warn you."

"Now what, Spock?" Kirk asked.

Spock ushered him out of the cabin to the shuttle's hatch. Unfastening the hatch, he shouldered a bag, then motioned Kirk out. He keyed the door closed, and unfastened the restrainers from Kirk's wrists.

"At least answer my question, Spock," Kirk said. "What now?"

Two dark eyes surveyed him calmly. "Now we walk, Captain."

Spock started across the desert, and shrugging helplessly, Kirk followed.

The twin suns beat down unmercifully on Kirk's back. His feet were hurting, and he had a raging thirst. Inwardly, he cursed the Vulcan. They had been walking for hours, and Spock did not look tired.

Finally even pride could do no more. "Spock, please," Kirk gasped. "I can't go any further."

Spock paused. "There is an outcrop of rock over the next dune. We will rest there."

Kirk gritted his teeth and concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other. They finally reached the outcrop, and he sank down gratefully.

"We will wait here for the sun to set," Spock said. "Travelling at night will be easier for you." He handed Kirk a flask of water, which the Human swallowed carefully, savouring each drop. After a while he looked at the Vulcan

crouched on the sand beside him.

"Why did you remove the restraints? Aren't you afraid that I'll try to escape?"

Spock raised a now familiar eyebrow. "Where would you run to, Captain?" he countered.

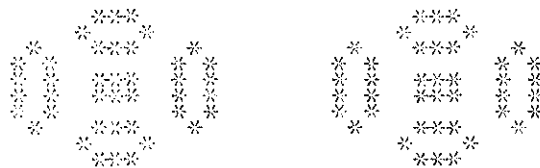
Kirk looked at the endless desert stretching in all directions. "Point taken," he said. Then his eyes narrowed. "Would it not have been easier to fly the shuttle to wherever you are taking me? Or to have waited beside the craft until nightfall?"

Spock studied the tops of his boots. "Kirk, there seem to be an unreasonable number of military camps on Vulcan. The shuttle's sensor picked them up. The reason for that uncomfortable landfall was because we nearly ran into a nest of Klingon battlecruisers. I do not think that we were detected, but I cannot be sure. To stay by the shuttle would not have been logical. I fear that they are massing for another long-range attack."

Kirk was puzzled. "Spock, Vulcan is under Klingon rule. Naturally they will have garrisons here -- and due to the local uprisings, they need more men than would otherwise be the case," he explained.

Spock stared at Kirk. He knew that the Human would not believe him, but the jigsaw was taking shape, each piece fitting in neatly. No, he would not tell Kirk yet. He must first hear more from his people at Koon'et'larai. "Try to sleep," was all he said. "You will need all your strength for the walk ahead."

Kirk needed no second bidding. He was exhausted.



"Six days!" McCoy ranted. "Six days, Scotty, and they have found nothing!"

Scott stared moodily into his glass. "Aye, they could be anywhere, Leonard. They may not even be on Earth."

McCoy's eyes widened. "Scotty -- you don't think that Spock could somehow have taken Jim to Vulcan?"

Scott nodded. "It's possible."

"All ships were checked," McCoy protested.

Montgomery Scott went very still. He recalled five days ago. He was in the command chair, and a sleek shuttle had passed the main viewscreen. "What about private shuttles, Leonard?" he asked. He jumped to his feet and snapped on the intercom. "Lt. Uhura, get me Admiral Weston."

McCoy looked baffled. "What's going on?" he asked.

"If I'm right," Scott said slowly, "the Captain is already on Vulcan."

"Scotty, you're not making sense," McCoy protested.

Scott waved him into silence as the intercom bleeped. "Mr. Scott," Uhura said, "I have Admiral Weston; piping through now."

The Admiral appeared on the viewscreen. "Do you have any further news, Mr. Scott?" he enquired.

"No, but I've remembered something, Admiral," Scott said. "Five days ago a private shuttle passed the Enterprise heading into deep space. I saw her, sir -- and I believe the Captain was on board."

The Admiral looked irritated. "Really, Mr. Scott, many private shuttles leave Earth. How can you be sure that Captain Kirk was on board this one? These craft have their own coded lock system; nobody can steal a shuttle these days. Besides, the guard would not let a Vulcan through -- and Kirk would have been hampering him as well."

Scott nodded. "Aye, sir, I know all that; but what if it was a Vulcan craft? Couldn't you make sure?"

Admiral Weston looked thoughtful. "It's a long shot, Lieutenant-commander, but we may as well check it out." The screen went blank.

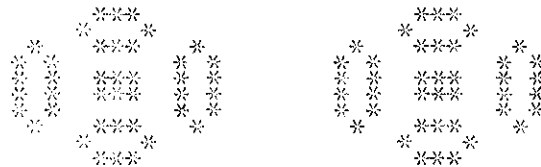
"I hope you're wrong, Scotty," McCoy groaned. "Are you sure that it was a Vulcan craft?"

"Aye, Leonard, that I am. It didn't penetrate at first -- but then I didn't know the Captain was missing when I saw it." He moodily refilled their glasses. "I could kick myself that I only thought of it now."

McCoy sighed and then sat down. "We'll find him, Scotty, and when I get my hands on Spock, I'll... Damn! I knew he would cause trouble!"

Both men fell silent, each studying his own drink, both lost in their own thoughts.

Oh, Jim! McCoy cried silently. Where are you?



Kirk was wakened by the Vulcan's insistent shaking. "Come," Spock said. "We must go -- but you had better eat this first." He handed Kirk a nutrient bar. It was tasteless, but Kirk ate it. He was then handed a blanket. "The temperature falls rapidly at night," Spock explained.

Kirk wrapped the blanket around his shoulders and fell into step behind the Vulcan. They walked in silence.

The twin suns quickly disappeared and the chill air crept into the desert. Night soon overtook them, the stars their only light, but Spock seemed sure of the way.

A roar made Kirk jump.

"Le-matyas," Spock explained. "They are extremely ugly and bad tempered. You need not be alarmed, however; they are far away."

Kirk was not reassured.

"Spock," Kirk said suddenly, "where are we going?"

Spock glanced at him. "Koon'et'larai," he said. He gave Kirk a moment to realise that the answer meant nothing to him, then continued. "It is the ancient camping grounds of the S'Kandarai, set in the remotest part of the desert. My ancestors were nomadic in PreReform times. Barbaric, but proud; fierce warriors. Through the teachings of Surak, the tribes became reconciled. Slavery was abolished and we took the path of peace and logic."

Kirk grinned ruefully. "And I guess you think of us as barbarians?"

Spock stopped and looked at him. "Within all races there remains the barbarian. It depends on how one controls that streak."

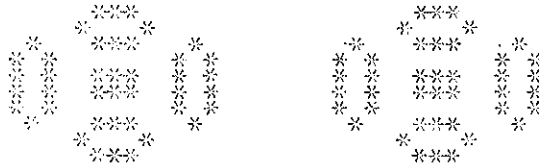
He walked on again. Kirk was suddenly irritated by the Vulcan's words. "You claim that you are a peaceful race," he said angrily. "How then do you account for the raids on the Klingons? Do peaceful people raid the outposts of

other races, killing women and children? Do peaceful people commit acts of piracy in free space?"

Spock's voice went cold. "Captain, have you asked yourself why only the Klingons were involved? Also -- did not the claims against Vulcan not run an identical pattern to those against the Romulans?"

Kirk could not answer. He was uncomfortably aware of his mother's words. Two races massacred, subjugated, and taken into slavery on the word of the Klingons.

Kirk felt vaguely uneasy.



McCoy looked up from the reports he was trying to work on. "Come in, Scotty," he said. "These can wait." He then noticed that Scott was carrying a bottle and two glasses. "Are we celebrating or drowning our sorrows?"

"Both." I had a call from Admiral Weston. An impounded shuttle is missing. A Vulcan shuttle headed for Cairo some days ago, but they deny any knowledge of its arrival."

McCoy sat frozen. "And?" he prompted.

Scott took a deep breath. "The guard on duty at the spaceport that night stated that Captain Kirk and his Vulcan slave were its occupants. He had no reason to disbelieve the Vulcan, who said that the Captain was drunk. Apparently he was fast asleep and did not seem to be under any restraint. The guard was handed the Captain's ID -- the only procedure needed for private vessels -- and he logged it with the craft's name."

McCoy whistled. "So easy?" he said. "Has the Admiral contacted the Klingon command on Vulcan?"

Scott nodded. "Aye, he has, and was told that he would be informed if it ever arrived there."

McCoy jumped to his feet. "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

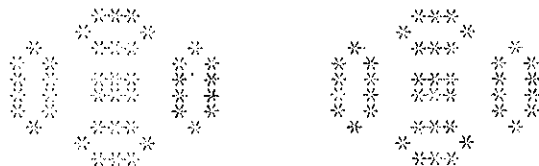
"Now wait a moment, Leonard. We can't just high-tail it off to Vulcan," Scott said.

"Why not?" McCoy demanded. "If Jim's there we must go and find him. Come on -- you're in charge now that Mitchell has transferred off!"

Scott nodded in sympathy. "I know, but Starfleet won't allow it. After all, they're not sure that they are on Vulcan."

McCoy sobered. "You're right," he said gloomily.

They turned back to their glasses. "You know something, Scotty?" McCoy said. "Before this affair is over, you and I are going to turn into a right old pair of alcoholics!"



"Kleeth!"

Lieutenant First Class Kleeth of the Klingon Empire burst through the door. "You called, my Commander?"

The Supreme Commander of Vulcan glared at his unfortunate underling. "Yes, Kleeth, I did. Have you detailed the men to go with you to that shuttle?"

Kleeth trembled. "Yes, my Commander. We leave at your command."

The Commander nodded. "I have had a message from Starfleet Headquarters on Earth. It seems that the illustrious Captain Kirk has gone missing, along with his Vulcan slave...in a shuttlecraft."

Kleeth's eyes widened. "Does my Commander think that it is the same shuttle that landed here?"

"Exactly, Kleeth. When you find it, we do not want to find any survivors." Kleeth saluted and turned to go. "Oh, and Kleeth - " the voice was silken - "if you fail to find...two bodies...you need not return. Do I make myself clear?"

Kleeth swallowed. "Perfectly, my Commander," he said.

Kirk shivered. "Spock, how much further?"

"Not far," Spock replied.

Kirk looked sharply at the Vulcan. He realised that he was green with cold. Cold affects him more than me, but he won't admit it, Kirk reflected, and hastily pushed another memory away; a memory of a stiff figure with green tinged lips and a cold cell. Or at least he tried to.

Now was the time, Kirk thought, to try and make Spock understand; he could not bear to carry that guilt for the rest of his life. He clutched at the Vulcan's arm, stopping him.

"Spock, I never wanted them to hurt you back at Surak'Ka. Neither McCoy nor I ordered those guards to...do what they did. I know it has taken me a long time to say it, but I am sorry." All he got in reply was the familiar raised eyebrow, but he stumbled on, needing to get everything out of his system. "The thing is that right from the beginning you have confused me. I couldn't talk to you, even back home on the farm, because I felt...well, guilty, I suppose. It was why I bought you - to make sure you got a good home, after..." Silence. "If you would only rant a bit - call me the biggest bastard in the universe if you like; it might make me feel better." He shrugged helplessly at the Vulcan's continuing silence.

Finally, Spock did speak. "Captain, it is not dignified for a Vulcan to 'rave'."

Kirk was not certain if he heard correctly. Was there a lighter note in the Vulcan's voice? If so, he had never heard it before. Suddenly Kirk did feel better; he was sure that Spock held no personal grudge against him.

"Come on, then," he said. "Let's go before we both freeze to death!"

The desert thinned out, giving way to a more rocky terrain. The suns were rising when Spock led the way down a gully and into a shallow cave.

"Are we resting here?" Kirk asked.

"We are at our destination," Spock said. "Come."

At the end of the cave, Kirk noticed a narrow opening. Squeezing through after Spock, he stopped and stared. They were in a natural amphitheatre; stone walls and rock formations surrounded them, an open sky was above them. Spock beckoned him to one part of the wall, and as he went up to it, a section of the wall swung back, revealing a tunnel beyond.

As they entered the tunnel the opening closed behind them, leaving them in total darkness.

"Spock," Kirk whispered. "Where are you?"

A hot hand fastened round his wrist. "Come - follow me."



The tunnel sloped downwards, and Kirk could feel that the floor was sandy. He could see a faint light ahead, and sure enough the passage ended in a dimly-lit chamber. One part of the wall was metal. Beside it was a panel with two buttons. Spock pressed one, and when nothing happened, the other.

"We may have to wait," he said. "This entrance is seldom used, and the door override has been disconnected. They will have to send someone from the main complex."

Kirk felt slightly apprehensive. What main complex?

They sat and waited in silence. Kirk wanted to ask a lot of questions, but did not know if Spock would answer.

The door suddenly slid open, and climbing to their feet they passed through, to be confronted by four armed Vulcans and a fifth standing to one side. Kirk was immediately surrounded, his arms forced behind his back.

"Khal dia."

Spock's voice was like ice. Kirk was released immediately. The fifth Vulcan now inclined his head. "Spock. I am gratified that you are here."

"I am gratified to be here, Sonnak. Who is in charge here?"

Sonnak looked at Kirk meaningfully. "Do you think it wise to discuss such matters in front of a Human?"

Spock's voice was freezing. "Captain Kirk is my responsibility. I ask again -- who is in charge?"

"T'Pau," Sonnak said.

Kirk was stunned. T'Pau had been the Council member that Earth had most wanted, but all reports had stated that she had been killed.

"Where is she now?" Spock was asking.

"She is in Council. Perhaps you would like to rest before seeing her?"

"Indeed. We feel the need for refreshment and rest. Come, Captain."

They followed the party along another tunnel, the rough walls of which were reinforced with metal. Entering a lift, they dropped many levels, and when the doors finally opened Kirk was aware that this construction was far more than a hideout. It was a vast underground complex with a maze of corridors, banks of computer terminals and scores of Vulcans silently going about their work.

I wonder why all this didn't register on our sensors? Kirk thought. What are they up to?

They passed through what had to be the main area, and into a side corridor which housed sleeping quarters. Sonnak ushered them into a room.

"Does the Human stay with you, Spock?"

"Affirmative." The answer was curt.

Kirk looked round the room. It contained two sleeping mats and covers, floor cushions and a low table. A small bathroom led off the room.

"You may shower if you wish," Spock said. "Check the setting. Once again it is only sonic." With that he dropped onto one of the sleeping mats and was instantly asleep.

Kirk studied the sleeping form. The thin face had become very familiar to him; the pointed ears, slanting eyebrows and high cheekbones. Suddenly he knew what the real compulsion to buy Spock had been. This was a man that he could depend on; a man he could trust his life to. And you may have to, he thought wryly, considering the present circumstances.

Stripping off his dirty, torn clothing he stepped under the sonic shower,

letting the biting blast peel the dirt and a fine layer of skin off him.

On returning to the room he eyed his clothing with disgust. He was not going to put those on again! Then he saw that someone had left a platter of food and drink on the table. Wrapping a blanket around himself he ate ravenously, leaving a fair share for Spock. His hunger and thirst sated, he collapsed onto the other mat, and fell asleep.

"There is nobody inside, sir."

Kleeth cursed. They had been forced to stop while a sandstorm raged on the outskirts of the desert, and now the shuttle was deserted. The suns had long since risen, and the heat was stifling. "We will just have to go on searching," he said grimly.

His men glanced nervously at each other. They were reluctant to carry on; they were deep into the desert, and previous patrols that had gone this far had not been heard of again. But they dared not disobey an order.

"What are you fools waiting for?" Kleeth demanded. "Into the groundcar! We go forward!"

Spock walked into the Council chamber and up to a seated Vulcan woman on the raised dais. He gave the open-fingered Vulcan salute, which was returned, and then sank to his knees in front of her. T'Pol's face softened as she placed two fingers to Spock's temple.

"I grieve with thee," she said softly.

"As I with thee," Spock returned. He stood up.

"Vulcan welcomes thee back," T'Pol said. Then, briskly, "It has been brought to my attention that thee has brought a Human with thee."

"It was necessary. I need Captain Kirk's assistance."

T'Pol looked at him sharply. "Does thee say that this Human helped thee to escape?"

Spock looked at Sonnak standing in the background. "No -- but his presence aided me. As I informed Sonnak, he is my responsibility."

"Keep him in his place."

"He will cause no trouble. May I formally enquire what has occurred in my absence?"

T'Pol waved him to a seat. "The manufacture of armaments has proceeded rapidly," she said. "We have been able to cause the Klingons much discomfort." She frowned. "It is most distasteful, and will take a long time. Sonnak will show thee what has been done."

Sonnak stepped forward. "I will show you now, Spock, if T'Pol so wishes."

"Yes -- it would be better to see than hear details from me," she said.

Spock rose to leave. "T'Pol, may I request an audience with you later? It is a private matter which I wish to discuss," he added quickly, noting her raised brows.

"Affirmative. I will send for thee."

Dismissed, Spock followed Sonnak out of the chamber.

Kirk had been awake for a long time before Spock returned. On waking, he had found the Vulcan gone and a fresh platter of food on the table. The door was locked.

Well, James T., there's no way out of this gilded cage, he thought. It was then that he noticed a robe laid out on the second sleeping mat, as well as a pair of thong sandals. Spock must have noticed my state of undress. He grinned, pulling the robe over his head. It was a bit too long, and he had to roll the sleeves up. Better than nothing, he thought. He sat down and had a little of the food. His thoughts turned to Bones and to his family, who by now must be nearly frantic. He

He jumped to his feet as the door opened and Spock came in, and nearly tripped over the robe. The Vulcan was also clad in robes, and Kirk remembered the night he had arrested him in the house outside ShiKahr, a tall, elegant figure. He winced.

"Have you eaten, Captain?" the Vulcan enquired. Kirk nodded. "Good. Follow me, then."

"Where are we going, Spock? The Vulcan salt mines?"

Spock's eyebrows rose. "Salt mines? We do not have salt mines on Vulcan."

"I didn't mean actual salt mines, Spock. What I meant was... Oh, never mind. Where are we going?"

Spock's eyebrows resumed their usual position. "We have an appointment with T'Pau."

It was an appointment that Kirk would rather have postponed.

Kleeth was jolted into awareness by one of his soldiers. "Sir, over there. I see something."

Kleeth focused his visi-glasses in the indicated direction, and a wolfish smile appeared on his face. Vulcans! Thoughts rapidly passed through his mind. If there were Vulcans here, so far into the desert, then their hideout must be near. If he could find the exact location, his Commander would be very pleased, and he, Kleeth, would receive promotion. Yes - not only would Kirk be eliminated (for he was surely here) but the Vulcan attacks would cease altogether. The Emperor was not pleased about these attacks of sabotage, and if the Exalted One heard who was responsible for squashing the rebellion on Vulcan, he, Kleeth, might even succeed Krath as Commander!

"Slow down!" he snapped. "They must see us..." Kleeth kept his glasses on the Vulcans, and chuckled to himself as they disappeared through a rocky opening. "Proceed to that outcrop of rocks," he ordered.

"Sir," one of his men enquired tentatively, "should we not inform headquarters?"

Kleeth rounded on the unfortunate soldier. "Do you question my orders?" he snarled. "We go forward!"

It was not long before they reached the outcrop, and climbing out of the car with drawn blasters they approached the wall where the Vulcans had disappeared. Kleeth frowned. There was no opening.

"Spread out!" he ordered. "There must be an opening or secret entrance somewhere."

Inside the base, the Vulcan monitoring a bank of viewscreens reached for his intercom. "The Klingons have reached the eastern entrance."

"Let them in." The reply was cool. Pressing a button, the Vulcan opened the door.

Kleeth jumped back in surprise as a humming noise filled his ears, and

got a bigger surprise when a section of the rock face slid open. Peering inside, he saw what appeared to be a gloomy tunnel. His men were crouched at his back.

"Do not make any noise," he whispered. "We must find out where the vermin are, and capture them." He realised that not one of his men was offering to go first. Swallowing, he led them inside, and then stopped as the door slid firmly closed again.

"The door has closed, sir," one of his men whispered.

"I can see that, you fool!" Kleeth cursed the incompetence of these fools. "We triggered the door release on the outside; we can do the same to get out."

They groped halfway down the tunnel, when a blinding light assaulted their eyes.

"Drop your weapons!"

"Shoot, you fools!" Kleeth screamed. Redbolts flashed as the Klingons obeyed, but they would not see the enemy. Above them, from a catwalk, the Vulcans stunned them with cool accuracy.

"Take them to the cells," Sannyk instructed the guards. "I will inform the Council."

Kirk stood beside Spock as the Vulcan politely knocked on a door. They were admitted, and he brought his chin up defiantly as the imposing-looking Vulcan Elder surveyed him with black, icy eyes.

"For what reason hast thee brought the Human, Spock? Thee said it was a private matter thee wished to discuss with me."

"It is," Spock said. "It also concerns Captain Kirk."

Another disapproving glance was directed at Kirk. He glared back.

"Very well. Proceed."

"T'Pol, what have you surmised about the Klingons' real reason for being on Vulcan?" Spock asked.

"These are Council affairs, Spock. Thee should know better than to ask." The reply was frosty.

Spock looked at her for a moment, and then clasped his hands behind his back. "Very well," he said. "Then I will tell you. Captain Kirk will tell me if I am incorrect on the Starfleet issue, and you, T'Pol, on the Vulcan."

"Approximately five point eight years ago, the Klingon Empire, which was at the time a fairly new member of the Federation, claimed that the Romulan Empire was violating Klingon space. Romulus was warned by the Federation to keep to their own Empire unless they went through the process of obtaining permits to visit and trade with planets in the Federation. Romulus denied any such violations.

"According to the Klingons, these excursions did not stop. When Klingon outposts were attacked, the galaxy automatically condemned Romulus. Again she denied all knowledge of these acts, but due to circumstantial evidence nobody believed her. Much hostility was created between the two Empires. Then the battlecruiser Kopoth disappeared on the fringes of Romulan space, and debris was found. Immediately, it was assumed that the Romulans had destroyed her."

Spock paused, and seeing that his audience was listening, one with an impassive face, the other puzzled, he continued.

"Without a proper declaration of war, the Klingon Empire launched an assault on Romulus. She was unprepared, and appealed to Vulcan for help, which after much debate Vulcan agreed to give. The invaders were repelled and Vulcan withdrew, finding the whole affair distasteful but necessary.

"There was an uneasy respite, and then the Klingon Empire struck again. This time there was a change; she had the full support of the Federation. Romulus succumbed, and became Klingon territory. A governor was appointed, and many Romulans exiled, eventually going to the slave blocks around the Federation.

"We now come to phase two," he said softly, looking at Kirk. "A Vulcan ship, the S'Hind'a, supposedly violated Klingon space. Vulcan was warned and banned from trading with the Federation. Then a lonely outpost manned by Klingon scientists was wiped out. Vulcan denied all knowledge, but Vulcan weapons were found. The Klingons sent messages to the Federation, videos of massacred Klingons accompanying them. The galaxy was in jeopardy; the Vulcans were avenging Romulus, the Klingons claimed.

"The Federation, anxious to avoid another confrontation, held talks on Beta. Ambassadors from both planets spent weeks condemning and defending. Vulcan lost her case for lack of evidence to prove her innocence, and the presiding Federation Council warned her; any more acts of hostility and drastic measures would be taken.

"One point three solar years ago, the Klingon cruiser Kojath disappeared. Debris was found, and Vulcan blamed. The Federation attacked swiftly, and without warning; two months later it was all over. Cities burned, the death toll high, and many exiled, to end on the slave blocks. Vulcan was placed under the Klingons, which, they demanded, was their right."

The room was very quiet. Spock went up to Kirk, and looked into the pain-filled eyes. "First Romulus, Jim Kirk; and then Vulcan. There will be a third phase, unless we can stop them. You can help."

Kirk returned the gaze. "What third phase?" he asked hollowly.

"When Earth falls, the galaxy will fall, and military rule will sweep away all freedom and peace," Spock replied.

"I don't believe you," Kirk said stubbornly; deep down, however, he did. It was all too possible.

"Then thee are a fool!" T'Pol stated. Both Vulcans were watching him.

"What proof..." he said lamely.

"Captain, in the desert I apologised to you for the rough landing. I spoke of Klingon battlecruisers. I sensed then that you thought I was being over-imaginative. I was not. According to our knowledge, there are two Klingon sister ships of a design that has not been used before or since - the Kopoyin and the Kojath. Those ships are at this moment in orbit above Vulcan.

"There has been much massing of troops on Vulcan. Your reason told you that it is because of our raiding parties, but logically it cannot be so. Mass opposition cannot defeat an organised native resistance.

"Also consider this. Your people have to know by now that you are here, on Vulcan with me - but the Klingons have denied all knowledge of any shuttle landing here, although we were detected on their sensors. They do not want the Federation here; and believe me, they would not let you go if they found you."

Kirk looked up sharply. "They may not know that we are here," he argued.

"They know," T'Pol said. "A party of Klingons has already visited the Surak; but Commander Krath denies all knowledge of the Surak landing - we intercepted a message."

He believed them. Breathing was difficult, but he managed to ask, "If this is true, how can I help you?"

Spock turned to T'Pol, his eyes pleading, not at all repenting of showing emotion at this stage, and then he turned back to Kirk. "If the Council agrees, you could try and talk to Starfleet." He looked back at T'Pol. "He would convince them more easily than we could."

"I will speak with the remainder of the Council," T'Pau said.

Kirk's mind was in a turmoil. He believed them...and yet... How could he be sure?

He deliberately turned and walked out of the room. Spock went over to the intercom and called security.

"The Human, Captain Kirk, is unaccompanied in the complex. Leave him, but make sure he does not leave the building." Quiet descended on the room. Spock stood deep in thought; T'Pau watched him carefully. At length he spoke. "T'Pau, I respectfully request permission to go to Surak'Ka."

Her black eyes glittered. "For what reason, Spock?"

"Blueprints," he said softly. "Any military operation must have plans. With them in our hands, we can prove that the Klingons have far-reaching plans. Nothing then can prevent Vulcan gaining her freedom. And if the Federation cannot be persuaded, those plans could aid us as well as the Klingons."

T'Pau reached out a hand. "Thee may go. If thee are successful, thy Human may more willingly aid us. He wishes to believe us, but he is too honest to accept such treachery from those he considered his allies without proof. I sense him an honourable man.

"I will watch thy Human, but be careful. Seek out Selek. I do not wish to lose thee as well." The latter was spoken softly, and Spock felt surprised. His grandmother had never shown such affection before.

He left her to find Kirk.

Kirk walked around aimlessly. He could now admit to himself that much truth had been spoken. He had hated those weeks on Vulcan. Visions filled his mind. Oh, God, what have we done? he thought. Had politics and the struggle for power blinded everyone in finding out who were friends and who was the enemy?

Know thine enemy. It must not happen to Earth.

Was this the agony the Vulcans had endured, knowing of their danger?

He noticed an empty room, and sank down into a chair, his chin cupped in his hand. How could he help? He wanted to help; instinctively he trusted the Vulcans, now that he had spoken to them, far more than he had ever trusted the Klingons!

It was then that another thought struck him. How could the Vulcans trust him to help them after what had happened? He doubted that he could look Spock in the face again. He, James T. Kirk, had personally arrested Spock; had given the order to raze his home to the ground; at HQ, instead of checking on him, had cast him aside as spoils of war. His neglect had nearly killed the Vulcan! It was no comfort that he had subsequently thrown the book at the two guards who had illtreated Spock; he was responsible. Then ducking out of his responsibility to his prisoner, he had sent him to the farm. This Vulcan, having to do farm chores, while he had returned to his beloved ship, pretending that he felt nothing...and even believing in that pretence.

His mother had seen through him -- had always been able to see through him. He had wanted Spock's friendship even from the start. And after he had been forced to accompany Spock here, after the first shock had passed, he wanted it even more.

"Do not condemn yourself, Jim." He jumped, startled by the already familiar voice. The Vulcan had been watching him silently.

"I guess I am pretty transparent," Kirk said ruefully. "But why, Spock? After all that I've done to you, why trust me?"

A glimmer appeared in the dark eyes. "You are so predictable, my Human.

Under that hard commanding nature, there is compassion. That is why I chose you."

Kirk looked puzzled. "Chose me? What do you mean?"

A slight green flush appeared on the tips of Spock's ears. "Jim, I have not been completely honest with you. The realisation of the Klingon motives formed while I was on the farm.

"There was another plan that my cousin Sallorn imparted to me during that meld on board your ship. It was to build ships and weapons out here, in order to retake Vulcan by force. As you have surmised, this is no ordinary complex; in the past it has been a scientific testing site, far out in the desert to ensure that any accidents occurring would not harm the populace - we simply extended and modernised the already existing complex where the S'Kandarai camped in the past.

"Sallorn's plan has been in operation for many months. The raiding parties were only the beginning. However, while I was on Earth, I decided that open negotiations should come before open warfare, and that the Federation should be warned of the Klingons' ambition to rule the galaxy. I told you that I felt a temptation to bring you here with me. That was not true. I waited for you to return to the farm, in order to force you here. If anyone can convince Starfleet, it is you. It is known that you are considered the best Captain in the Fleet."

Kirk blushed slightly. "That is very flattering - but Spock, I have not thought this through yet. I have doubts..." You can't still admit that! Kirk cursed himself. You are a coward! You still cannot admit to the injustice that the Federation has handed out here!

"Very well, Jim. Think it over. You have time." Spock turned and left, not telling Kirk where he was going. He felt uneasy; if he failed to return, the Human would never leave Vulcan. He trusted Kirk, and he was sure that T'Pol would keep him alive, but could Kirk live with the distrust that so many of the Vulcans felt for him?

Spock walked swiftly through the base and as he rounded a corner he saw a group of Klingons under guard. So they had been followed?

"Sannyk, where did these Klingons come from?"

The other Vulcan lifted an eyebrow. "We have been monitoring them for some time, Spock. They followed one of our parties here. Will you inform the Council of their capture, or shall I?"

"You may have the honour, Sannyk. I have other matters to attend to."

"So, Vulcan. You managed to reach your dungheap! I assume the Human Kirk is also here?"

Spock surveyed the Klingon coldly. "You assume correctly. What interest have you in the Captain?"

The Klingon remained silent. Spock turned to Sannyk.

"I am leaving for a few days. Captain Kirk has freedom of movement in the general areas. Keep an eye on him."

Spock hurriedly requisitioned an aircar. He would have to make haste. If these Klingons had found the base, so would others.

The reconstructed lights of Surak'Ka glowed. Spock had ditched the aircar, and keeping to the shadows, had slipped into the city.

There were no Vulcans abroad, as a curfew had been imposed at the take-over. Drawing his desert cloak about him, he slipped through the shadows, avoiding the patrols. He made his way down a street, and halted outside a house. The walls

still wore evidence of phaser burns, pitted and scarred. The door opened at his ringing, and he went inside.

"T'Rill. You are well?" he enquired.

"I am well. Spock, I am pleased to see you."

"Is Selek within?" he asked.

She nodded and led the way up a flight of stairs, entering a curtained-off room. An old Vulcan lifted his head at the sound of his footsteps, and fixed sightless eyes on Spock.

"Father, it is Spock," T'Rill said.

"Welcome to my home, Spock of Vulcan," he said formally, and waited for Spock to explain his visit.

"Sir, I need your help. I have the need to enter Klingon H.Q."

"What makes you think that I, an old man, can help you?"

Spock allowed himself a slight twitch of the lips. "T'Pau," he said.

"We will assist you. T'Rill, summon the others."

Kirk could not sleep. He glanced at the other sleeping mat, wondering where Spock was. He felt suffocated in the room, and donning his robe, slipped out.

He asked various Vulcans of Spock's whereabouts, but was met with negative answers, pleas of ignorance; all perfectly polite, but totally unhelpful.

He turned into a branching corridor, and then realised that he had taken the wrong one. He was about to retrace his steps when he noticed a flight of steps leading downwards.

Curiosity got the better of him, and he followed them down, to discover a row of cells - all occupied. Klingons!

"Captain Kirk!"

The whisper came from the middle cell. He went over.

"Captain Kirk, you must help free us, then we can all escape."

"Who are you?" Kirk asked.

"Lt. Kleeth, High Command on Vulcan. We were looking for you when we were captured. Your people will be relieved to know that you are alive."

Kirk's eyes narrowed. T'Pau had said that the Klingons had denied his being on Vulcan. One of them was lying...

"I can't help you," he said. "I also am a prisoner here."

Kleeth ignored that. "Quickly - turn off the force field and we will escape together. Headquarters will be pleased to know the location of this place."

"No," Kirk said. "You are lying; Starfleet does not know where I am, because your people denied that I was here. I want to know why."

A look of defeat came over Kleeth's face, quickly turning to anger. "You are a traitor, Kirk! You have sided with these dogs against the Empire!" he screamed.

"I am no traitor," Kirk said. "It is the Empire that is devious."

Kleeth smirked. "So you will not help me, Human? It is irrelevant. This hideout will be found, but by then it will be too late for you."

"What do you mean?" Kirk snapped.

"You Earthers are so naive," Kleeth gloated. "Our victory in conquering your planet will be so easy -- much easier than overrunning Romulus and Vulcan. You believed us so readily... Soon we will be the new masters of the galaxy."

Spock had been right. "I wouldn't count on it, Kleeth," Kirk said, and he left the furious Klingon.

He had to find Spock. That was no easy task, and Kirk finally gave up looking. There was another alternative. He braced his shoulders and went to T'Pau's quarters, scolding himself for being intimidated by a woman, and a civilian at that.

On being admitted, he came straight to the point. "Where is Spock?"

"He has gone to Surak'Ka, Captain."

Kirk blinked. "What for?"

"Evidence to prove his case."

Kirk's astonishment gave way to anger. "Is he trying to kill himself? And you let him go alone?"

T'Pau lifted an eyebrow. "Control thyself, Captain. Spock is able to look after himself." She looked at him steadily. "What is thy business with him? Hast thou come to a decision?"

"Yes. I will help you all I can. I apologise that it has taken such a long time for me to realise the wrong we have done you."

T'Pau rose to her feet. "My grandson will be gratified to hear it."

Kirk's mouth fell open. "Spock is your grandson?"

"Indeed. Thee find it unusual?"

"Well, no. It's just that I did not realise his family was so important." He did not add that T'Pau did not seem to him to be the type to fill the role of grandmother. "What can we do in the meantime?" he asked. "Surely we should send someone to help him?"

T'Pau's brows lifted again. "Tell me, Captain, why should thee be interested in Spock's well-being? He brought thee here against thy will. Dost thee not resent this?"

Kirk took a deep breath. "No, I don't resent him. Not now." He grinned suddenly. "As long as he doesn't make a habit of it."

"That, Captain, depends on the outcome of the present situation," T'Pau said dryly.

Kirk frowned and made a mental note to ask Spock about the future. "I guess it does," he said, and left to await Spock's success. He would not allow himself to think about failure.

Commander Krath jumped to his feet at the sound of the explosion. Still more explosions followed and he raced out into the smoke-filled corridor. Above the noise of the roaring fire, alarm bells clanged shrilly.

"Kron!" Where was the fool?

A grimy figure appeared out of the smoke. "My Commander, the depot has been hit, and this very building is on fire!" Kron burred.

"Then you had better see that it is put out!" Krath thundered. "Put every available man onto it. Then I want the culprits found!"

Krath went back to his office, and opening his safe he withdrew the Klingon trump card. Tucking the tapes under his arm, he turned to find himself facing the wrong end of a phaser.

"How did you get in here, Vulcan?"

Two dark eyes surveyed him coolly. "That is irrelevant. What I want are those tapes."

Understanding dawned. "That fool Kleeth talked!" Krath screamed.

"Affirmative," Spock lied. "He is our guest."

Krath smiled unpleasantly. "You will not get far, Vulcan."

Something in the Klingon's eyes warned Spock. He leaped to one side as the blaster was fired. He felt the heat of the shot, but Krath received the full force of it. Kron was still gazing unbelievably at his injured superior when he felt the stunning effect of Spock's phaser. Luckily, Kron's weapon had not been set for destruct. Scooping up the tapes, Spock slipped into the corridor and was soon out of the building. The Klingons were too busy to notice him.

Seven days had passed with no sign of Spock. Kirk felt helpless, and vented his frustration by prowling the corridors. At first he had felt claustrophobic, but then he realised that he could well be sitting in a cell instead. What made it worse was that he was very much an outsider. He could not talk to any Vulcan to pass the time; they were all busy, and to them it was illogical to waste time on idle chatter. He longed for McCoy to be with him; to listen to the Doctor's cynical comments.

It was during one of these pacing sessions that he was apprehended by Sonnyk. What now? Kirk thought. The idea that Spock was dead came to him. This Vulcan disapproved of him, and Kirk was sure that he would like to see him locked away.

He was ushered into the Council chamber. Solemn faces looked at him, and as he looked round uneasily he saw Spock's familiar face.

"Spock! You're safe!" A huge grin split his face. Then he remembered where he was, and forced a more solemn expression onto his features.

T'Pol stood. "Please sit, Captain." There was a chair next to Spock, and Kirk took it, shooting his Vulcan a questioning look. All he received in reply was a raised eyebrow.

T'Pol continued. "Captain Kirk, the Council has spent many hours discussing thy offer to help in negotiating with the Federation, and it has been decided to accept thy offer. Thee has been under close surveillance, and nothing has been found wanting. Thee has spoken with the Klingons, and at first hand have learned of their treachery. It was sufficient to make thee see the Federation's peril; Spock has brought back further evidence." She signalled for the lights to be dimmed and a viewscreen at the end of the room lit up.

Kirk felt his blood run cold as pictures of Earth's strategic defence system flashed onto the screen. Detailed plans of the Klingon offensive, right down to the striking times, followed. Each battlecruiser had a specific target; space stations, ammunition facilities, Starfleet control - the list was endless. After that, shock troops were to be beamed down and landed in shuttles.

Further images were projected - Starfleet starships. This was followed by a second Klingon fleet, branching out in all directions; to the Lunar base, Starbase XI, and other Starfleet posts. Kirk was convinced that, once started, nothing could stop the assault.

The screen went dead and the lights brightened. "How soon can you raise Starfleet?" Kirk asked in the quiet that followed.

"We have been trying to do so for the last hour. The frequency will not be picked up by the Klingons, due to a device of ours. But it will take time."

Kirk glanced at Spock. "What if we go through the Enterprise? She should

be on routine patrol, and nearer to us than Earth. She could act as a booster."

"We need her hailing frequency," T'Pol said.

"Enterprise, this is Captain Kirk. Come in, please."

Uhura gave a squeal and swivelled in her chair. "Mr. Scott! I have the Captain!"

Scott leaped out of the command chair. "Put it on the screen, lassie, and call Dr. McCoy!"

All breathing on the bridge ceased as the distorted image of their Captain flickered onto the screen.

"Are you receiving, Enterprise?"

Scott let out a bellow. "Captain! Where in all the nine worlds are ye?" He stopped at Kirk's stern expression. "Stand by to receive change of frequency. Code 10-Z."

McCoy chose that moment to bomb onto the bridge. "Jim!" he whispered, and felt like fainting from relief.

"Uhura," Scott demanded, "did you get that?"

"Yes, Mr. Scott. Switching over now," she said. "Frequency changed."

Kirk's face grinned at them. "Good work, Lieutenant. Mr. Scott, stand by to receive orders."

"Yes, sir. But Captain, where are ye?" Scott asked.

"That doesn't matter right now. You are to call Starfleet - top priority. Get hold of Admirals Komack and Weston, and have them patch through to this frequency. Tell them to have a recorder going. What they hear will be... 'fascinating'." They saw Kirk throw a quick glance over his shoulder, and were astonished at the grin on his face.

McCoy could not contain himself any longer. "Jim, what happened? What has that Vulcan devil done to you?"

"Later, Bones. Valuable time is being wasted. You have two standard hours to the next call." The screen went blank.

"Sorry, sir," Uhura said. "Contact has been broken."

"Scotty, what is all this about?" McCoy was puzzled.

"I dinna ken, Doctor, and we have two hours to wait before we can find out. Lt. Uhura, send a top priority message to Starfleet - for the attention of Admirals Komack and Weston."

Kirk turned and found all eyes on him again. "They'll arrange it. They're a good crew."

"Our thanks, Captain," T'Pol said. "We will convene in one point two hours." The Elders filed out, leaving Spock and Kirk alone.

"You should have told me you were going to Surak'Ka," Kirk said.

"There was no point."

"No point?" Kirk exploded. "What if you had been captured? I should have gone with you. No - sorry. I keep on forgetting the present circumstances. That reminds me - Spock, what happens to me if we pull this thing off?"

"Captain, the day Vulcan is officially free, so are you. If we fail, there is no way that you will ever get off Vulcan. The Klingons will make sure of that. You will be safer with us."

"Well, then - here's to success."

"To success," Spock echoed.

Aboard the Enterprise, nerves were stretched to breaking point as the zero hour ticked closer. Scott still bristled with indignation at the dressing down he had received from Admiral Komack. "This is a highly unorthodox method of communication, Mr. Scott. If this is a hoax, both you and Captain Kirk, when he returns, will be severely reprimanded." It had only been Admiral Weston's pacifying nature that had made Komack capitulate and agree to the contact.

The beeping of Uhura's board made everyone jump. She flipped a switch. "U.S.S. Enterprise," she acknowledged.

Kirk's face appeared on the screen. "Enterprise, has Starfleet been notified?"

"Yes, sir," Scott answered. "Lieutenant, patch through."

She snapped more switches and the viewscreen split in half, one side showing Kirk, and the other the two Admirals. "Starfleet, Captain Kirk coming through. Do you copy?"

Admiral Komack looked grim. "Receiving you, Enterprise. Kirk! What do you think you are doing? What has been going on?" he demanded.

Kirk nodded at the Admirals. "Admiral Komack - Admiral Weston," he said, and McCoy took a sharp breath. Kirk had put on his diplomatic face. This was going to be a battle.

Komack opened his mouth to give vent to his disapproval, but Weston cut in. "Captain Kirk, this is a most unusual request on your part. Although we are pleased to see you well, you had better explain your disappearance and the reason for this transmission. The recorder is on."

Kirk smiled. "Yes, sir. My abduction is irrelevant to this situation, and for the record, no charges will be pressed by me." McCoy turned apoplectic. "The matter on hand concerns the safety of the galaxy. We are all in danger from a race of tyrants whose only purpose is to tramp other races into the ground and subject them to military rule. I speak of the Klingons."

The two Admirals exchanged glances. "Go on," Komack said.

"We all know the story of Romulus and of Vulcan," Kirk said. "The evidence of their raids on the Klingon Empire was overwhelming; the Federation had no reason to disbelieve the Klingons, a member - albeit a new one - against two relatively unknown planets. However, the disciplinary methods used were criminal, especially since the wrong people were being punished."

Weston's eyes narrowed. "What are you trying to tell us, Kirk?"

"Just this, sir - the Klingons faked everything to point to Romulus and Vulcan."

"But the dead and the maimed? The ships which went missing?" Komack was bewildered.

"You need a certain amount of realism for any plan to work," Kirk said softly. "They did it themselves to their own people."

Scott and McCoy looked at each other in horror.

"I cannot believe it!" Komack rasped.

"I know it sounds impossible - to us," Kirk said. "It took me a long time to be convinced...and time is what we do not have. Think," he urged. "What is the next heavily populated planet?"

"You cannot mean..."

"I do, Admiral," Kirk interrupted. "Earth. With Earth out of the way, nothing will stop them."

Admiral Weston looked thoughtful. "Kirk, do you have proof of this?"

Kirk looked to his left. "Spock?"

"Carry on, Captain," came the answer.

"First of all, the pattern of complaints and the supposed acts of violence by Romulus and Vulcan are almost identical. Secondly, the shuttle in which Spock and I reached Vulcan was detected by Klingon sensors." Scott threw McCoy a triumphant look. "In an intercepted message from Admiral Weston, the Klingon Commander was heard to deny all knowledge of our having landed here. Thirdly, the planet has garrisons containing far more men than is necessary...unless they plan a raid on somewhere further from their own planet than Vulcan is. In addition, the supposedly destroyed cruisers, the Kopoth and the Kojath, are at this moment in orbit around Vulcan along with other assault ships. Fourthly, a Klingon officer sent to find me and now a prisoner, as much as told me that the Empire was going to attack Earth. This was after I refused to help him to escape. The Vulcans are very thorough, and what was said has been put on tape." There was a slight pause, and then what had been said in the cells drifted through the speakers. The two Admirals looked grim.

"Finally," Kirk continued, "there are actual blueprint plans of the coming attack. They are masterly, and without knowledge of them, any defence on Earth's part will not succeed."

"You will not like what I am about to say next. Starfleet can have the plans -- but at a price."

"What price?" Komack demanded.

"T'Pol will tell you." Kirk moved to one side and there was a collective gasp as the most powerful woman on Vulcan, who had eluded all attempts to capture her, appeared on the screen.

"Vulcan and Romulus have suffered a great injustice at the hands of the Federation. The means of self-preservation thee have forced us to adopt we find distasteful, but we will carry on. This Council has reached an agreement that will benefit both Vulcan and the Federation."

"Vulcan and Romulus are to be set free; all citizens are to be returned to their home worlds, and five seats each on the Federation Council opened to us. When thee has publicly transmitted our demands to all the known worlds, thee may have the tapes. Thee has two days, Admirals."

"That's blackmail!" Komack objected.

T'Pol lifted an eyebrow. "Indeed it is, but it is a small price to pay. If thee does not succeed in persuading other members of thy Council, the plans are just as useful to us as to the Klingons. Vulcan is large, and there are many scientific means open to us. Be warned -- thee picked the wrong race to victimise."

Weston spoke. "How do we know that you are not bluffing?"

Kirk came back into view. "They are not bluffing, sir. The plans are real. I have seen them." He stuck out his chin defiantly. "If they are ignored, I remain on Vulcan, and believe me, I will help these people in any way I can."

McCoy groaned. "Easy, Jim -- that's an Admiral you're talking to!"

Komack looked defeated. "Very well, we will do all we can. There does seem to be quite a lot of evidence. You will have our answer in two days, at the same time as this communication. Enterprise, stay in the immediate vicinity. Komack out."

Starfleet's screen went dead, shortly followed by the Vulcan transmission.

McCoy felt cheated. Didn't Jim want to talk to them? Of course, maybe he wasn't allowed to. He looked at the stunned faces on the bridge.

"Well, Scotty. That's a mess, isn't it?"

"Aye. They have us over a barrel, all right."

"Mr. Scott," Sulu said. "Do you think that they are telling the truth?"

"Aye, lad. The Captain believes it, and that's good enough for me. I want this bridge complement here on the two-day deadline. Lt. Markham, check the crew roster and make any necessary changes. Remember also that not one of you is to breathe a word to the rest of the crew. Consider this as highly confidential."

"Aye, sir." It was a ragged chorus.

"I think I will prescribe some medication for myself," McCoy said gloomily, and left the bridge.

Scott sank into the command chair and stared ahead. Not only was the fat in the fire, but the haggis as well.

"Thee did well, Captain," T'Pol said. "The Council will convene in two days."

Kirk looked at Spock. "Do you think we got through to them, Spock?"

"Indeed, Captain, if you did not, it was not your fault. A most remarkable performance. Let us hope that they have the sense to comply."

"If not, it will all have been for nothing," Kirk said sadly.

"T'Pol does not make empty threats, Jim. No Vulcan does."

Kirk's mouth fell open. They would really take up arms against...it would be against the entire Federation, although Earth would be the primary target.

"If it takes Vulcan a hundred years, she will fight for her freedom," Spock said noticing Kirk's expression.

"Well," Kirk said dubiously, "let's hope you won't be jumping from the frying pan into the fire."

Spock's eyebrows shot skywards. "That is a fascinating remark. Why should anyone jump from pans into fires?"

Kirk laughed. "It's only an expression. It means to step from danger into more danger, or trouble."

"Indeed. It is a most illogical expression. Come, Jim - it is time to eat."

Starfleet was in an uproar. An emergency meeting had been called, and those who were wondering what it was all about were dissuaded from asking. High-ranking officials walked about with grim faces.

Within the large Council chamber, Admiral Weston stood up. "A decision has to be made. Time is running out."

"I say it is a lot of nonsense," Admiral Farris said. "The Klingons are our allies!"

"Then we have one way of finding out for sure!" Komack snapped. "Ignore the Vulcans and run the risk of being one day annihilated, or release the vulcanoid races and then find out whether they have spoken the truth or made fools of us. I do not think we dare take the chance that it is the latter."

Another Admiral interrupted. "I agree with Komack. It is not worth the risk. We know nothing about Vulcans, but they have been able to cause the

Klingons a great deal of trouble. I think they would prove to be formidable enemies. Besides, this fellow Kirk is our top Captain. We all know his record. If he believes this, I think we should listen to him. If we don't we could be putting into jeopardy the lives of every man, woman and child on Earth - and the other Federation planets." He chuckled. "And from what we have heard of this T'Pol, I do not relish tangling with her!"

The presiding chairman stood. "A lot has been said. The Council must decide. We will vote now."

The Federation stood still and listened. Officials on every member world transmitted the orders from the Council through the video-tel networks.

"From this day onward, the planet of Romulus, and all that was the Romulan Empire; and the planet and territories of Vulcan, have been released from Klingon rule. They have been reinstated as free planets, with the right of self government and the choice of entering the Federation as full members.

All Vulcan and Romulan citizens are to be returned to their home worlds. If any Vulcan or Romulan citizen is found to have been forced to remain in the service of a former owner as slave chattel or servant, that person or persons will face criminal charges. The residing officials of all planets will undertake the task of repatriation.

Vulcan and Romulan currency will be reinstated. The Vulcan and Romulan language is to be recognised. Impounded Vulcan and Romulan goods, whether space transport, material goods or anything vulcanoid, is to be handed in to Starfleet personnel. Your payment for these things will be returned by the Federation on production of a receipt."

By command of Admiral McArthur, Starfleet Headquarters."

Speculation swept through the Federation, and the Klingon Empire remained silent.

"They've done it!" McCoy whooped, and the bridge erupted in an uproar. The scene at the Vulcan base was far more dignified.

"Thy people have shown much wisdom, Captain. It is Vulcan's turn to do the same. Spock, thee may release the details."

Spock switched on the console and sent out the hailing frequency. It was immediately answered. "This is the U.S.S. Enterprise. We acknowledge your signal, Vulcan."

Spock's face was bland as vanilla. "Is the Starfleet Council available?"

"They are receiving you now," Uhura answered.

"That's him!" McCoy yelled as the Vulcan appeared on the screen.

"Starfleet, as agreed upon, we have the Klingon offensive plan ready. Prepare to record."

Starfleet's recording computer hummed, and those present were transfixed as the images flashed across the viewscreen. Eventually they ceased, and Admiral McArthur faced the viewscreen.

"We are indebted to Vulcan. No amount of apologising can undo the damage that has already been done, but perhaps one day we will be forgiven."

Spock's eyebrows did an all-time high. "It is illogical to hold a grudge," he said. "You acted according to the information you had at the time. Now, it will be the Vulcan Elders' choice on continuing relations."

McArthur's eyes twinkled, understanding. "One more thing. What about Captain Kirk?"

A disguised twinkle, that only Kirk saw, appeared in Spock's eyes. "Captain Kirk will remain our guest until the last Klingon is off Vulcan soil."

"Very well," the Admiral said. "Enterprise, stay in the area. McArthur out." The screen went blank. The Federation had a lot of hard work ahead of it; and there was also the matter of the leak in their security system that had allowed the Klingons to discover so much about Earth defences.

The Vulcan transmission was still operating. McCoy bounded forward. "Jim! Can you hear me?"

"Yes, Bones." Kirk winced at his friend's impetuosity.

"Are you okay?" the Doctor demanded.

"Perfectly, Bones. Sorry - we're cutting the transmission."

Kirk blushed slightly, knowing that the Council must disapprove of McCoy's outburst. T'Pol stood. "Thee must excuse us. There are many matters to be discussed."

Kirk followed Spock out of the Council chamber. "A formidable lady. Now I know where you get it from," he teased.

"What makes you think I am like T'Pol?" Spock asked.

"I found out that you're her grandson."

"Indeed. Would you have found me as formidable if you had known of it beforehand?"

"You bet! I'd have been terrified!" Kirk laughed.

The following months were hectic. The Klingons, in a last desperate bid to gain the upper hand, launched a half-prepared assault on Earth. They were easily repelled, and after follow-up space battles, were totally defeated. Those left behind on Vulcan were captured by the townsfolk, aided by the Vulcans who were returning from the desert.

Military headquarters were installed on Klinga, while the Vulcan and Romulan captives were repatriated. Many of those taken from both planets did not return, the victims of Klingon brutality. A zone was established around the Empire, controlled by strategically placed space stations.

The months were just as hectic for Kirk. He accompanied Spock everywhere as Vulcan raised itself from the ashes, letting the Vulcans see that it was perfectly possible for Humans to work in co-operation with them. At first he had been surprised to discover that the Vulcan was a scientist as well as a Vulcan Commander, but then, on thinking it over, he did not find it so incredible after all. The Vulcans clearly would not find it logical to support an 'idle rich' caste, and Spock had too brilliant a mind to waste. As the days of reorganisation progressed, Kirk had come to admire that fine mind, which operated almost like a computer.

Finally the last Klingon was deported, and Vulcan entered the Federation.

On that day of Vulcan victory, Spock entered Kirk's room at the Vulcan Academy, which had been hastily repaired.

"Well, Spock," Kirk said. "That's everything you've worked for accomplished."

The Vulcan looked almost agitated. "Indeed." The dark eyes never left his. "The Enterprise is in orbit. Will you be leaving now?"

"That was the bargain." Would the Vulcan force him to stay longer?

"It was," Spock said quietly. "Come, then. I will take you to the space-port at ShiKahr. I have permitted myself to inform your people. The Enterprise



awaits her Captain."

Kirk followed the lean figure to the aircar. They travelled in silence all the way to the spaceport, where they were met by a jubilant McCoy.

"Jim! Oh, God, Jim! I never thought I would see you again!" He shot a dirty look at the Vulcan. "I want you on board for a physical - now!"

"Really, Doctor," Spock said, "we are not in the habit of ill-treating our slaves." Kirk caught a gleam of amusement that flashed in the dark eyes.

"That remains to be seen!" McCoy snapped. "I also have a few things to say to you!" He was really angry, Kirk realised.

"What might that be, Doctor?" Spock asked as calmly as ever.

"Just this." McCoy's eyes flashed blue fire. "You betrayed the trust Jim's mother put in you. For that alone, I would slap you in the brig so fast that your ears would spin!"

Spock lifted both eyebrows. "Indeed, Doctor. I hardly think the charge would...stick, I believe is the word. Is that the only charge?"

McCoy exploded. "Just listen to him! The only charge, indeed! I'll tell you what else!" By now Kirk was having difficulty in keeping a straight face. "Damage to property! Kidnapping a Starship Captain, not to mention clobbering the Chief Medical Officer of the same ship! The theft of a long-range shuttle - and blackmail; not to mention causing an incident on a Federation planet!" McCoy stopped to draw breath.

"May I remind you, Doctor, that at the time Vulcan was a planet under enemy occupation; now she is a Federation member."

"I know, I know," McCoy muttered in disgust. "I only wish that I never have to set foot on this dust-bowl again. Also that I never have to see you again. Let's go, Jim."

Kirk turned to Spock, smiling. "He doesn't really mean it, Spock. He knows as well as I do that we are forever in your debt."

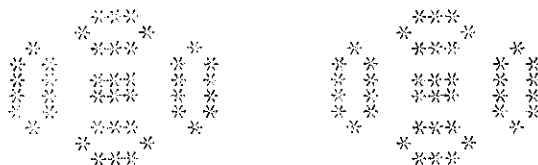
"I do mean it!" McCoy yelled. "Whose side are you on?"

Kirk grinned, and then sobered, looking at Spock. "I am going to miss you."

Spock's eyes glowed. "I am somewhat reluctant to release you into the Doctor's care; he is overemotional." He extended his hand in the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, James Kirk." With that he turned and walked into the crowd.

"Overemotional?" McCoy spluttered. "Who does that pointed-eared devil think he is?"

Kirk looked after the retreating back. "Spock of Vulcan," he said softly. Suddenly he laughed. "It's good to see you, Bones." He steered the still muttering Doctor towards the transporter.



A full solar year had passed since the Vulcan incident. The Enterprise went about her daily missions - life had returned to normal.

Vulcan remained in the background of the affairs of the galaxy, but on those occasions when she did voice her approval or disapproval, the rest of the Federation listened. None deemed it wise to ignore her.

One day the routine life aboard the Enterprise was disrupted. They had

been engaged in peaceful star mapping when an ion storm struck with little warning. For hours the ship was tossed about while she battled her way out of the storm. It was a very battered ship and crew that limped its way into Starbase XI for repairs.

Kirk's face was grim as he walked into the base commodore's office.

"Ah, Kirk," Commander Stone said. "Take a seat. That was quite a storm you went through. I'm sorry to hear about Tomlinson."

"Yes, he was a fine officer." A computer bank had exploded in the science officer's face midway through the storm. He never stood a chance.

"The problem is," Stone went on, "that we don't have an immediate replacement for you. However, I understand that your warp drive was damaged. That means that you will be here for some time. I'll press for a replacement for you, however, and let you know the minute I hear anything."

"I'm short a First Officer too," Kirk said. "Mine has been promoted and leaves us here. Any word on his replacement?"

"Sorry, nothing," Stone said flatly.

Kirk sighed and started his debriefing.

The Enterprise stayed in orbital drydock for a full month before Scott was satisfied with the refitted engines and warp drive.

The day before the ship was due to depart, Kirk visited McCoy for a drink.

"Well, Bones, we leave tomorrow."

"About time, too," McCoy grumbled.

"I thought you would be happy to be at a nice safe Starbase instead of having your molecules scattered about the galaxy," Kirk teased.

"There is that," McCoy agreed. "Unfortunately, even I am getting bored. I could do with more exciting - and important - things to do than handing out hangover pills."

They were interrupted by an incoming call from Commodore Stone. He looked a little irritated. "Jim, I have news about your new First Officer. You're to break orbit tomorrow and rendezvous with a shuttle from Earth. He has also been appointed Science Officer. Must be a shortage in Starfleet for such an unorthodox appointment - I just hope he can handle the double job." Stone gave the co-ordinates for the rendezvous.

"Thank you, sir." Kirk was rather relieved. "May I have his name?"

Stone's expression changed from irritated to uncomfortable. "I don't have any details about him. Starfleet Command said it was not necessary because you know him. Haven't the faintest idea why they should be so secretive. That's all, Jim. Stone out."

McCoy whistled. "Now that is an unusual posting. And it's not like Starfleet not to give any details beforehand. We'll probably find that he's a demoted Admiral or something like that."

Kirk grinned. "Hardly likely, Bones. I'm just grateful to get somebody. Though I must admit I can't think of anyone I know who has the qualifications to handle First Officer as well as Science Officer."

The shuttle that approached the Enterprise was a magnificent craft. The design was unknown to the bridge crew, though to Kirk it looked...familiar.

"Come on, Bones, let's go and meet our new mystery officer. Lt. Sulu, you have the con."

They took the turbolift to the docking hatch; a security guard was already in position. They clearly heard the click of metal on metal as the craft docked. There was a short wait for pressure equalisation, and then the door slid open.

Kirk's jaw dropped, and he was half aware of a strangled exclamation from McCoy.

"Spock!" All Kirk could manage was a half-choked whisper.

An elegant eyebrow lifted. "Permission to come aboard, sir."

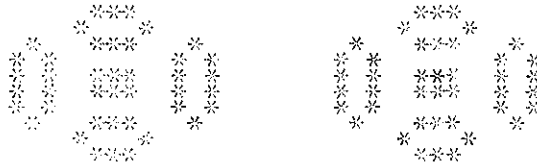
"Granted, Mr. Spock!" With a wicked smile, Kirk turned to the still gaping McCoy. "May I introduce you to the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Leonard McCoy."

Spock let his gaze wander over McCoy.

"I do not believe it," McCoy said. "I-do-not-believe-it!"

"An illogical comment, Doctor, as I am standing in front of you." McCoy later described the answer as 'smug'. "You recall, Doctor, that on Vulcan, during a particularly emotional outburst, you wished never to see me again. I must admit, I wondered why. So - as one of your quotations goes, 'If the mountain won't come to Muhammed, then Muhammed must go to the mountain'. Studying your behaviour will be fascinating."

For once McCoy was left speechless.



Alice Kirk switched off the tape from her son. He sounded overjoyed at having Spock on his ship. She smiled. He had taken a long time to formulate that friendship, but she had known that he would, in the end. Men could be so blind sometimes.

She fingered the exquisite gold chain set with blue Vulcan crystals that hung round her neck. The message had been short. 'With sincere apologies. Spock.'

No; it would not do for a certain Vulcan - or a certain Human - to find out who had left certain implements lying about, especially an aircar that was usually locked away at night. It would not do at all...

